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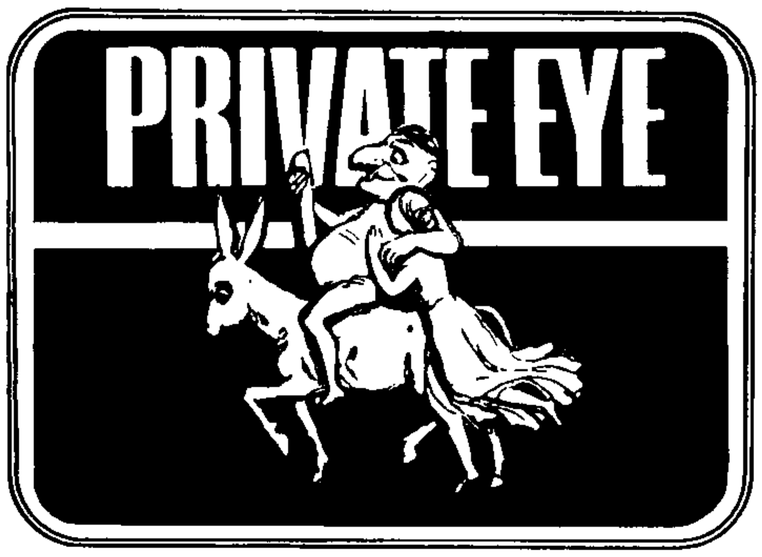

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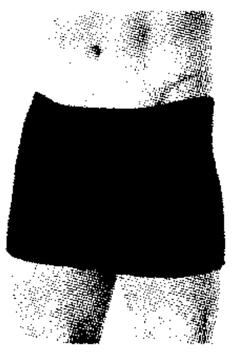

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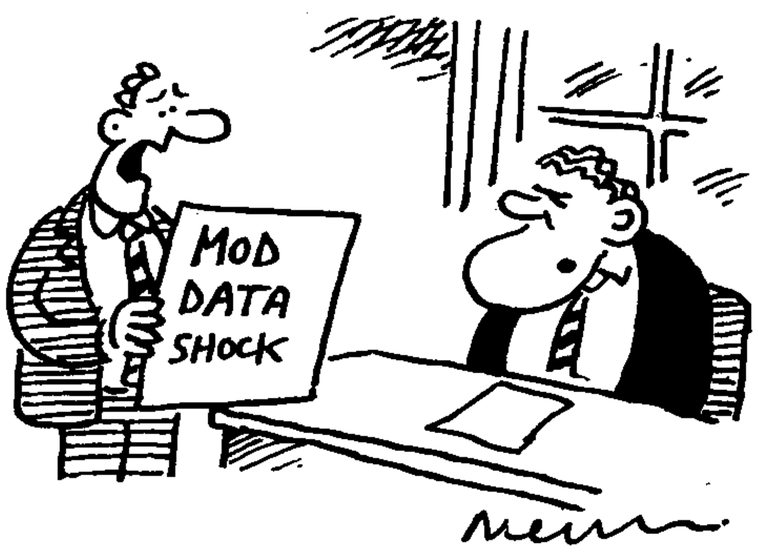

"We've lost track of all the things we've lost"

HOW JOURNALISM DOESN'T WORK

Exclusive serialisation of Nick Davies' *Flat Earth News* – See Literary Review special, pp24-25

EDITORIAL

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ABC

NORTHERN CROCK

"THE proposed financing structure envisages Northern Rock raising funds from investors in the financial markets backed by a mixed pool of assets," explains the Treasury of the proposals dreamt up by Goldman Sachs to save Northern Rock.

Sound familiar? It should. For this is a fairly good definition of a so-called "collateralised debt obligation", the packaged-up mortgages that were so heavily flogged by the world's bankers that they gummed up the markets last year, causing the "credit crunch" that led to the run on Northern Rock.

Though there is something ominously familiar about Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling now sending Northern Wreck to market to issue more collateralised debt obligations, the difference this time is that they come with a copper-bottomed guarantee from UK taxpayers right from the start.

THE big advantage of the Brown-Darling-Goldman Sachs bonds wheeze is that, unlike nationalisation, this plan looks set to keep up to £55bn of debts and guarantees off the government balance sheet.

Were such amounts to appear on-balance sheet, of course, the Northern Wreck debt would take UK public debt over the 40 percent limit imposed by Gordon Brown ten years ago.

A Treasury spokesman admitted to the *Eye* that previous Office of National Statistics decisions suggested the debt would indeed be off-balance sheet and that there might have been some "general" discussions with the ONS, though the ONS denied any knowledge of these.

PS: After the run on the Rock, Darling called for "far greater openness to prevent risky investments being hidden off balance sheet". Unless it's *his* balance sheet, that is.

WHAT could have appealed to Goldman Sachs about a multi-billion pound bond issue?

Well, the going rate for issuing bonds is 0.1 percent; so some select investment bankers could soon be sharing tens of millions in fees from the Wreck.

Last time Gordon Brown came up with a bond scheme, to raise money for an immunisation fund (*Eye* 1172), among the usual suspects trousering vast amounts of cash for doing very little was… Goldman Sachs.

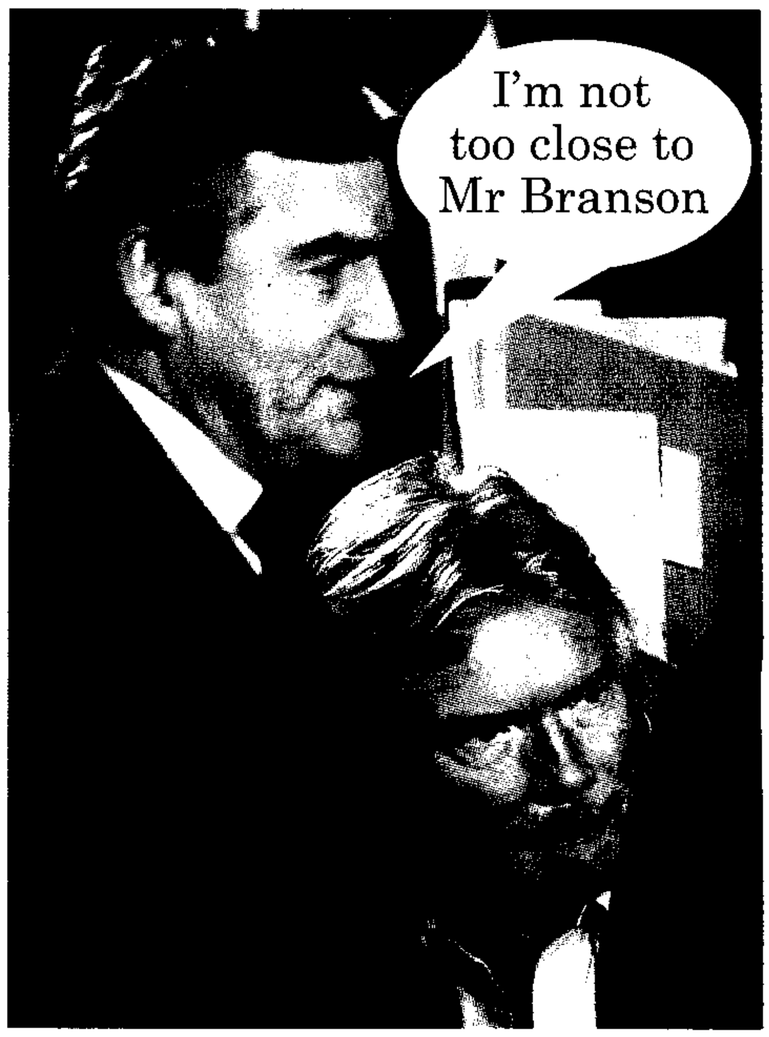
WHEN did Chancellor Darling become a Northern Wreck mortgage customer? Darling made this surprise announcement as a declaration of interest when making an announcement about the government's support for the failed bank on 11 October.

"My wife and I own a small flat in London which is presently let," he disclosed. This declaration had been made in the 9 October internet version of the register of MPs' interests. There had been no previous mention of any London flat in the 28 August internet register.

So was the Straw Man one of the many who took advantage of Northern Wreck's giveaway deals as part of the kamikaze dash for market share during 2006 and 2007 which brought about the demise? When was the property first disclosed in the register? Was it before the crisis broke in early September? How much is the mortgage, what are the terms and when is it due to be repaid? Perhaps we should be told as it presumably forms part of the taxpayers' security?

● *The government's desperate men: Slicker, p30.*

THAT GREAT BEARDIE / BROWN BAIL-OUT



NUMBER CRUNCHING

50 days Time for which taxpayers will remain liable for £25bn loan to Northern Rock under current deadline

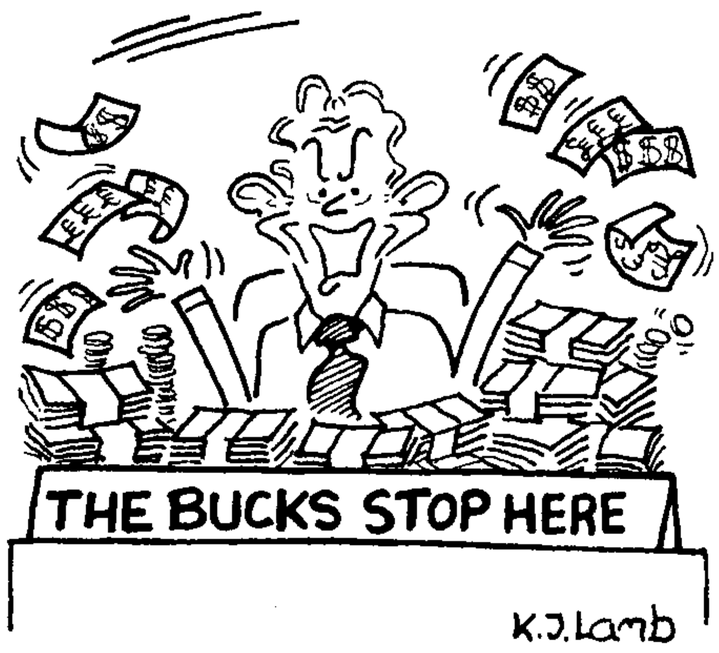
5 years Time for which taxpayers will remain liable for £25bn government bonds under Alistair Darling's 'rescue' plan

WHILE Tony Blair was enjoying 10 years at No 10, the US investment bank he now joins for a half a million a year was rarely out of trouble.

JP Morgan was at the heart of the two biggest corporate frauds in US history: Enron and Worldcom. The bank set up several of the offshore and off-balance sheet structures that enabled the bent energy trader to pretend that money it borrowed was actually profit. JP Morgan eventually paid a $135m fine for its role.

Soon afterwards it was hard at work for dodgy telecoms firm Worldcom, issuing bonds whose prospectuses ignored the huge accounting fraud within the company. Three years ago the bank was forced to pay $2bn in compensation to shareholders.

All of which explains why Blair and JP Morgan are so well suited. One evidently has a history of lies and putting out dodgy dossiers, while the other is a very rich investment bank.



NEWS

NO SURPRISE that last week's report from the National Audit Office on the private finance initiative provided succour to PFI companies while managing to overlook the bigger picture.

Although the auditors criticised the cost of making changes to PFI facilities, such as putting new sockets in a hospital or CCTV cameras in a school, NAO boss Sir John Bourn still declared: "PFI deals have proven to be flexible to change and, when considering that these deals will span a number of decades, that is essential." (Sir John, by the way, has recently been wined and dined seven times by the country's leading PFI consultant PwC, including at the Ivy, the Savoy and the Lanesborough). Expect his comment to be ripped out of context and parroted by the PFI industry for years to come.

In fact, while PFI can cope with the odd light bulb change (for the right price), the scheme's lumbering *in*flexibility and complexity have devastated parts of the health service. Reports have shown that hospital trusts with schemes are far more likely to have huge deficits and consequently cut services or "steal" them from more suitable hospitals to pay for fixed PFI charges. In defence, PFI has caused years of delay and added billions to crucial projects.

One figure buried in the NAO report that won't be advertised by the PFI lobby is that the minor changes studied amount to just 1 percent of total PFI spending. The 99 percent represented by payments on the core contracts has to cover financing costs well above what conventional government borrowing would cost and the PFI companies' astronomical profits – the reason PFI is so expensive for the taxpayer but lucrative for the bankers and consultants. But this is the PFI elephant in the room the NAO has steadfastly refused to consider, largely because it has its own perverse incentives in the escalation of the scheme.

● *Bourn's grand days out, p27*

OXFORD University's Saïd Business School is offering an exciting new MSc course in "major programme management". But who has been chosen as co-director of the university's BT-sponsored centre which will teach the course?

Step forward Dr Patrick O'Connell, boss of BT Health and the man responsible since 2005 for delivering the NHS's delayed, expensive and all-round disastrous "major programme", the £12.4bn National Programme for IT scheme!

Curse of Gnome

THE Curse of Gnome has struck with unusual swiftness against Michael Cole, Mohamed Fayed's silky spin-doctor.

It was spurred into action by his letter in the last *Eye* protesting at our "libellous assertion" that the Duchess of York had accused him of lying in his account of a conversation she allegedly had with Princess Diana. Cole declared that Lord Gnome had "lost the point as well as the argument".

On the day the issue reached the news-stands, the pompadoured PR wallah was in the witness box at the Diana inquest, being grilled about his conception of truth. In his inquest evidence, for example, he claimed that a month before the fatal crash Dodi had told him that he and Diana intended to marry. Yet in a huffy letter to *Sunday Telegraph* editor Dominic Lawson in September 1997, he insisted that "Dodi never spoke to me about the relationship".

Similarly, although he now says that Mohamed Fayed told him immediately after the crash that Diana was pregnant, at the time Cole said there was "not a scrap of evidence" that she was expecting Dodi's child. He even filed an official complaint with the Press Complaints Commission about a *Daily Telegraph* report mentioning rumours of her pregnancy.

The coroner, Lord Justice Scott Baker, criticised the bouffant buffoon for being "less than honest" in lodging a complaint which (if what he now says is correct) he knew to be false. No doubt the coroner can now expect one of Cole's famous letters accusing him of losing the plot.

SCRAPING THE BURRELL

Q. The language used by Her Majesty has from time to time been paraphrased or put into a shorthand in the media and so on.
A. Yes.
Q. You know what I am talking about?
A. Yes.
Q. What phrase is that?
A. "Dark forces"?
Q. Yes.
A. Oh, I see. Yes, well, I have seen that certain times. It rather resembles something from *Star Wars*, doesn't it?
Q. Is that a phrase Her Majesty used?
A. Absolutely not.
Q. Is it a phrase you have ever used?
A. I have never used that word.

So said former royal butler Paul Burrell during cross-examination at the Diana inquest last week. But the poor man's memory must have been playing tricks, for he did indeed use the term "dark forces". In the *Sunday Times* in October 2003… And on the BBC's *Today* programme and on Canadian television that same month… Er… and then on the *Larry King* show in November 2003… And even in his own book, *A Royal Duty*. Perhaps it's all a bit of a (dark) blur for him.

Street of Shame

RICHARD KAY adopted a tortuous wicked-whispers style in the lead story for his *Mail* diary last Friday, as he wrote about a "leading media personality" who fathered a child during an affair five years ago.

"He is financially supporting a little girl whose mother has accepted that he will never leave his wife for her," Kay simpered. "The honourable manner in which he has handled the episode is probably just what would have been expected of him."

Why so coy? Could it have anything to do with the fact that the *Daily Mail*'s proprietor, Lord Rothermere, is himself still paying maintenance to a love-child he fathered out of wedlock before he was married?

"BRITAIN'S taxes must attract wealth creators," writes economics pundit Irwin Stelzer in the *Daily Telegraph*, attacking government plans to make non-doms pay an annual £30,000 fee.

Currently non-doms who live here don't have to pay UK tax on income they earn overseas. Stelzer warns the fee will drive talented foreigners away from Britain. What he conveniently omits to mention is that he himself is an American non-dom living here.

Being non-dom means Stelzer, also a *Sunday Times* columnist, is not obliged to pay any UK income tax on his main job as senior fellow at the Hudson Institute in Washington DC.

TIME for another ringside bulletin on the grudge match between former *Sunday Telegraph* editor Dominic "Fatty" Lawson and featherweight *Torygraph* editor-in-chief, Will Lewis.

Shortly before Christmas Lawson told a House of Lords committee about the interfering methods of the *Telegraph*'s owners, the Barclays. Lewis had his chance to retaliate while being questioned by the same committee earlier this month. Aidan Barclay "has never or will never ask what is in the paper the next day", he insisted.

Committee chairman Lord Fowler didn't seem entirely convinced, and continued to ask about Lawson's remarks. An exasperated Lewis retorted that Dominic Lawson was "wrong on lots of different things. He has been out of the business for quite some time", ignoring the fact that he is an *Independent* and *Mail on Sunday* columnist.

Lawson took his revenge later that week when reviewing the Sunday newspapers on Andrew Marr's sofa. Glancing at the splash in the *Sunday Telegraph* about human organs being taken and transplanted without consent, he dismissed it as "a classic Sunday newspaper story that isn't true".

RADIOACTIVE deposits at the high tide mark may have triggered life on Earth, revealed a science story on the *Telegraph*'s "Earth" website. Unfortunately, the wave in the accompanying photograph didn't stop at the high tide mark.

Alert readers would have recognised it as the Boxing Day Tsunami of 2004, which killed more than 225,000 people, including Canadians John and Jackie Knill whose camera later washed ashore.

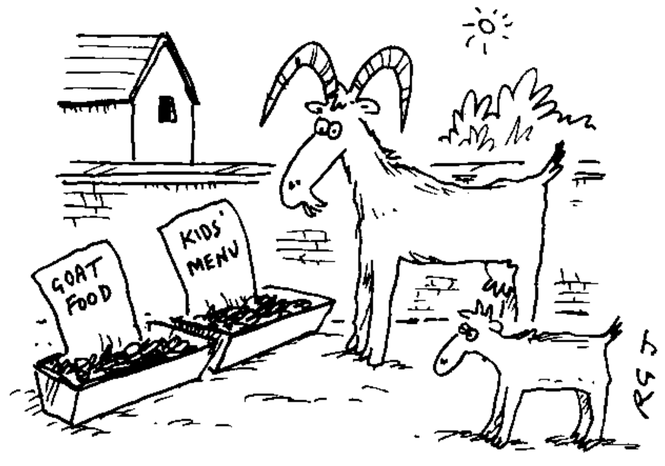
The photos retrieved from that camera, a tragic record of the couple's final moments, were printed around the world and thus ended up in photo libraries, but are perhaps not the best choice for a stock "beach" shot.

THE tabloids never need much prompting to revisit the Moors Murders, and last week they had the best excuse in ages – even if they couldn't agree whether 14-year-old Jennifer Tighe, who went missing in December 1964, was "Myra's fifth victim" (*Daily Mail*) or "Hindley's sixth victim" (*Sun*).

Either way, Ian Brady's own lawyer "claims to have discovered the name of the teenage girl and expects his client to confirm that she was another of the couple's victims". The "lawyer" is none other than our old friend Giovanni di Stefano. He is a man of many parts – self-publicist, fantasist, "swindler without scruple or conscience" (in the words of an Old Bailey judge), self-styled chum of Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic – but it's surprising that hacks still refer to him as if he were also a proven lawyer.

Despite queries over Di Stefano's credentials by courts in Britain and Ireland in recent years, Di Stefano has failed to produce any documentation proving he is qualified (*Eyes passim*). So how much faith can one have in claims from "Ian Brady's lawyer"?

Back in July 2006, Di Stefano announced with equal confidence that Brady was about to tell the police where he and Hindley had hidden the body of their last victim, 12-year-old Keith Bennett. Almost 18 months on, Greater Manchester police are still waiting.



HAVING pursued the story of Peter Hain's generous benefactors with some vigour, perhaps the *Guardian* will now turn its attention to the curious case of City grandee Paul Myners, a long-standing crony of Gordon Brown.

Last July, Myners was put in charge of the new pensions body, the Personal Accounts Delivery Authority, at a salary of £150,000 for a two-day week. In accordance with the Nolan requirements, the official announcement of his appointment included a declaration from Myners that "he is not a member of a political party and has made no donations to any party".

Which was strictly true – but more than somewhat misleading, since it omitted to mention that in the previous two months he had given £12,500 to Gordon Brown's leadership campaign. Bizarrely, he decided that this didn't count as a political donation.

If the *Guardian* wants to interrogate Paul Myners it knows where to find him. Among his other jobs, he is chairman of the Guardian Media Group.

TWO months ago, with a proud fanfare, *Grauniad* bosses unveiled the latest product of their obsession with all things internet – Guardian Languages, a virtual school in which foreign students can use Skype technology to have online conversation practice with English-speakers.

These teachers – or "partners", as they are known – sign up with the company, download the software and start talking to students ("users") around the world. What could be simpler?

Alas for the *Grauniad*'s reputation, it turns out to be a rather iffy enterprise. A reporter from the trade paper *English Language Gazette* who enrolled as a "partner" was surprised to find that he was immediately given the mobile numbers of lots of Chinese girls without any background checks or questions about his experience or qualifications. He was even more surprised to discover that teachers are paid just £5.52 an hour – the UK minimum wage – whereas the going rate for private English conversation classes in London is about £20 an hour.

The firm claims that teachers will eventually earn more, as they can ask for a pay increase if they receive consistently good ratings from the students. To improve their chances they can download one-hour lesson plans from Guardian Languages for £20 each. Again, this is way out of line with standard rates. For 120 hours of course material from UK language schools, a teacher would usually pay about £25. From Guardian Languages, the same amount would set you back £2,700.

Paying a minimum wage and overcharging for course material isn't illegal, of course – though one can imagine what the *Guardian* would say about any other company that behaved like that. But Guardian Languages also insists that its teachers have to be "native" English speakers, which means that UK residents who were born elsewhere in Europe are ineligible, however fluent their English. (Even Sir Tom Stoppard would fall at this hurdle.) Barring non-natives from jobs for which they are otherwise qualified is illegal under EU law.

Guardian News and Media thinks it can justify the policy as "a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim". Hard evidence is required, however, before such discrimination is permitted. When *English Language Gazette* asked the *Grauniad* for its evidence, none could be provided.

FOLLOWING Julie Burchill's recent "guest column" in the *Sun*, the paper decided to offer her a regular slot.

Burchill, who often claims she has given up journalism, didn't exactly leap at the chance. For a 700-word column, to appear 46 weeks a year, she demanded *£250 a word* – which would work out at £175,000 a week, or an annual salary of more than £8 million. This had the desired effect: the *Sun* pleaded poverty and settled for a one-off instead.

No doubt the paper is saving its pennies in order to realise its plan of luring back gorblimey specialist Richard Littlejohn. Rebekah Wade will need all the dosh she can get to match the £1m package Littlejohn enjoys at the *Daily Mail*. But some colleagues suspect he may be willing to take a pay cut to return to the *Sun*. Why? "He doesn't feel loved," a *Mail* executive explains.

It's a hard life, especially when you're competing with the egos of Amanda Platell and Allison Pearson – both of whom Littlejohn holds in such disdain that he refuses to call them by their names, referring to them instead as the "Wednesday and Saturday columnists".

THERE was a sudden influx of sex-toys in the *Daily Star* newsroom last month, sent by companies hoping their wares would be included in a guide to naughty Christmas prezzies. So many arrived that a cupboard has been set aside for their storage.

Alas, the staff are so sex-obsessed due to their paper's content they can't resist taking these treats home to try out. First to go were the "vibrating butt plugs". Last week, as *Star* hack Tom Savage complained in an internal memo, "the rest of the bondage kit has now also gone missing. That's a blindfold, 'silky restraints' and other tickle-related bedroom paraphernalia. A healthy selection of vibrators (of varying sizes) has also vanished."

Staff at Dirty Des's throbbing organ are urged to be vigilant. Have they seen someone furtively shuffling away from the cupboard? Is the hack next to them smiling more than usual? Can they hear a low humming noise?

"POP singer Pete Doherty is dating a stunning young catwalk model who has been tipped by fashion experts as the next Kate Moss," the *Mail on Sunday* revealed on 14 January.

The model in question was one Portia Freeman, whose father – "Dr Luke Freeman, a specialist in anthropology at University College London" – was said to be both infuriated and in denial about the tryst. "My daughter isn't having a relationship with Pete Doherty," the paper reported him as saying, while still running the story.

In fact the *MoS* had spoken to an entirely different Dr Freeman. "I don't know who Portia Freeman is," this hapless Dr Freeman tells the *Eye*. "I suspect her family shares my name but they never asked me who I was. The journalist put the phone down before I had a chance to explain."

WADE'S WORLD

WEIRDO *Sun* editor Rebekah Wade couldn't possibly be worried about her job, could she? When sales figures for December, released on 11 January, revealed that her paper was now selling fewer than 3m copies for the first time since 1974, despite a cover price discount, the flame-haired editrix went into face-saving action.

She hastily inserted into the next day's edition a page-two puff intended to convey that all was well. "Your super *Sun* has always brought you the very best stories. And 2008 is no different with a series of cracking **exclusives** every day this week leaving our rivals in the shade," it boasted, before listing its earth-shattering scoops about, er, Britney (see below) and the attempted suicide of an actor from *The Bill*.

For whose benefit was this exactly? Readers, staff or her new boss James Murdoch, installed at Wapping shortly before Christmas? The last of these, of course. But it then dawned on her that this might not be the way to his heart.

James Murdoch is an earnest eco-champion who has been spearheading News International's efforts to go carbon-neutral. Lo and behold, a few days later Wade launched Green Week in the *Sun*, "highlighting the plight of our planet". That's more like it!

NICE to see Wade and her colleagues are still remembering those valuable lessons she learned from her training session with mental health charity Sane after deriding Frank Bruno as "bonkers" on the front page five years ago.

"I think they are on alert now not to use some words and be more careful," a spokeswoman for the charity said at the time.

So how did the paper cover the riveting "news" that Britney Spears had been seen singing one of her own songs in a hotel bar days after being forcibly removed from her home by police and taken to hospital for psychiatric evaluation? With the headline "LOONEY TUNES".

Moreover, the *Sun* revealed in a sensational "WORLD EXCLUSIVE" last Wednesday, Britney had written a suicide note which was found by a friend before her latest meltdown. In the paper's online version, beneath an accompanying photo of the singer was a link to X17, the celebrity gossip site which supplied it.

Alas! *Sun* readers who clicked on the link, eager for more pix of troubled Britney, were confronted with the headline: "X17 XCLUSIVE – BRITNEY LEAVES SUICIDE NOTE? NOT TRUE!!!"

"THE son of security minister Admiral Lord West has been arrested for alleged drug offences," the *Sun* noted in a tiny news item at the bottom of page two on 17 January. "Alex West, 25, a journalist, was held with a suspected drugs dealer outside a nightclub in Hackney, east London."

Curiously the paper omitted to mention for which publication the 25-year-old journalist has been plying his trade since autumn 2007: er, namely the *Sun*.

Unfortunately for West, his connection to the *Sun* was not overlooked in the office: having been bailed by police he has been suspended from his job. This is only to be expected, of course: when Wade herself was arrested on suspicion of assault in November 2005 she, ahem, returned to the office on her release from custody and was immediately taken out for dinner by Rupert Murdoch.

The paper did manage to pad out its report with the reaction from a "furious" Admiral West, who reminded the paper that "drugs are illegal, they ruin lives". The reporter assigned to ring him up to get these quotes? John Kay, whose record at the *Sun* has been unblemished since he was welcomed back following his conviction for killing his wife.

THE ZZZ-LIST

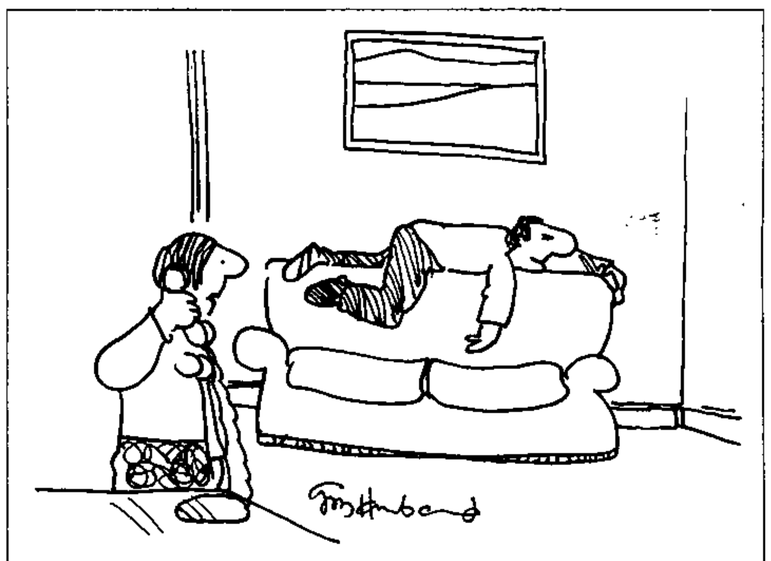
Utterly pathetic non-stories about celebrities from the national press. Readers' contributions welcomed...

"Amanda Holden clearly gets a kick out of her new blue shoes – which made her the life and sole of the *Britain's Got Talent* judges in Manchester yesterday."

– Mirror, *18 January*

"Eschewing a winter break on the ski slopes or in the Caribbean, Lord Freddie Windsor whisked his actress girlfriend Sophie Winkleman to the blustery Suffolk coast... On Sunday morning after breakfast, Freddie drove Sophie the 200 yards to her parents' cottage and dropped her off."

– *Richard Kay*, Daily Mail, *8 January*



"He's having a cat nap"

HAIN'S MANUAL

IN 1980, up-and-coming Labour politician Peter Hain wrote a right-on pamphlet on "reviving the Labour party" through involvement in grassroots anti-racist, anti-nuclear, anti-cuts and pro-union campaigns.

"Effective power, as opposed to the trappings of it, really lies in big business, the multinationals and the private and public bureaucracies which serve them," Hain cried. "Power in short lies in the edifice of capitalism for which the parliamentary system is a front."

By 2007, however, Hain was running a deputy leadership campaign funded by anti-union millionaires and run by, er, business lobbyists. Hardly unique as political conversions go; but what seems to have undone him is forgetting to admit he had entered the "edifice of capitalism".

As the *Eye* noted last May (1185), Hain's apparently left-tinged campaign used funds from businessmen such as ex-Tory British Rail privatiser Chris Campbell to pay for the skills of Steve Morgan, a lobbyist more used to representing corporate giants, and John Underwood of PR firm Clear, part of the Freshfields group. Underwood's firm also represents hospital privatisers Reed Health.

Hain launched his campaign with an article in the *New Statesman* saying: "We have been careless, indifferent and, at times, needlessly offensive to the concerns and values of too many of our natural supporters." He promised to appeal to "Old Labour" sentiments with a call for "redistributing not just wealth, but also power – the drive against inequality should be the golden thread that runs through our entire agenda".

However, Hain's team then accepted £14,000 from Isaac Kaye (see *Eyes passim*), the millionaire linked to the pro-Apartheid South African National Party. Kaye used to be chairman of Norton Healthcare, which is to face charges later this year of conspiracy to defraud the NHS by price-fixing and manipulating the supply of drugs during his reign. Also during Kaye's chairmanship, a Kentucky court ruled that Norton had violated the right of nurses to take part in trade union activities in their own time.

Hain's attempt to appeal to "Old Labour" using "New Labour" money failed. How long his political career can last remains to be seen.

EVEN Peter Hain must know that Gordon Brown's declaration of support for him, muted as it was, comes not from loyalty or affection for the permatanned pensions minister but out of a deep fear that deputy Labour leader Harriet Harman could be next for the chop, followed by "Bendy" Wendy Alexander, sister of key Brown clansman Douglas Alexander. Both are up to their necks in the "dodgy donations" scandal.

In fact the Iron Chancellor has harboured a grudge towards Hain since the latter's attempt to challenge the then shadow chancellor's new economic orthodoxy back in the early 1990s.

When Hain and fellow MP and economist Roger Berry – both of whom were officers of the Tribune Group of Labour MPs – wrote a critical pamphlet calling for higher taxes for the wealthy and more spending on public services, Brown wasted no time exacting revenge. He sent lackey MPs Janet Anderson, Greg Pope and others to flood the Tribune Group, organise new elections and topple Hain and Berry. The Tribune Group collapsed shortly afterwards.

Hain's occasional subsequent forays into economic policy were equally disastrous, repeatedly earning him Brown's frosty disapproval. Now, having damned Hain with faint damnation – accusing him of incompetence – the PM is having his full revenge.

HAIN'S hugely expensive campaign for deputy leader was doomed, say seasoned Labour backbenchers, as soon as Steve Morgan arrived to "manage" it. Morgan has a track record that Hain should have known about.

Morgan came to prominence in the early 1980s as a vocal supporter of the Militant Tendency, earning himself the nickname the "Maesteg Maggot". He subsequently teamed up with student politician Phil Woolas, now a government minister.

Morgan owed his rise through the ranks of the National Union of Students both to Woolas and to his vitriolic attacks on the, er, Militant Tendency. Along with a short and equally controversial tenure as a Labour councillor in Greenwich, Morgan was a close colleague of George Galloway when the pair of them ran the charity War on Want, shortly afterwards to be investigated by the Charity Commissioners.

Morgan's company website is being "updated" so inquisitive members of the public do not know whom his current client list includes. On taking over as office manager of the Hain4Labour campaign, he donated £5,000 – curiously not by a direct donation, but through the "money-laundering" operation, the Public Policy Foundation think tank. He has since lambasted the non-existent think tank.

So how did Morgan (who has been busy lately helping Hillary Clinton's campaign across the Atlantic) find time for the Hain campaign? Did he give his time for nothing, along with his donation? The campaign managed to raise and spend more than £180,000 – an enormous sum, but on what? Did Morgan charge for services rendered, either by him or by his company, Morgan, Allen, Moore? Watch this space.

THE THINGS THEY SAY

"It is of the greatest importance that the conduct of Members of the House meets, and is seen to meet, the high standards expected by the Wicks committee [on standards in public life], and also by our constituents. Lapses, however rare, are very damaging to public confidence in the House and in our parliamentary democracy. If lapses occur, and are not seen to be tackled with sufficient rigour, the effect is many times worse."

– **Peter Hain MP**, then Leader of the House of Commons, 26 June 2003.

LOBBYING LATEST

MORE on the traffic between Gordon Brown and lobbying company Lucas Lawson Mendelsohn.

The latest link involves Tony Pilch, a Brown aide from the 2005 election and a former worker at Brown's favourite think tank, the Smith Institute, who has recently joined LLB as a "senior vice-president".

Brown's other links with the firm include recruiting the company's founder, Jon Mendelsohn, as his fundraiser. Mendelsohn soon got tangled up in the secret donations scandal at the end of last year, when he admitted that he knew all about David Abrahams's donations but kept them quiet. (Mendelsohn also made one of the late-declared donations to Peter Hain's deputy leadership campaign.)

Pilch will now be well placed to help LLM clients win government contracts. They include companies such as Amey, Atkins, United Utilities and Unisys, an ID cards wannabe.

Meanwhile John Prescott's former aide Mick Halloran has also decided to follow the money. Halloran, a former special adviser to the "old" Labour stalwart, is joining lobbyist Citigate. His new employer's clients include such "new" Labour favourites as the private prisons people Group 4 and the private defence outfit QinetiQ.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

JUST how much taxpayers' money does the European Commission give to organisations whose main use for that money is... lobbying the European Commission?

EU funding of environmental groups and other NGOs is well-known and is based on the argument that they must compete in Brussels with the deep pockets of industry. Money given to NGOs is also spent on worthy projects, from assisting torture victims to campaigning for minority group rights.

However, a look at a list of more than 80 NGOs receiving EU money, revealed by recent written questions from Tory MEP Chris Heaton-Harris, shows some causes are more worthy than others. Several political organisations get cash, notably to lobby for a more federal Europe.

These tend to be based in Brussels and headed up by Euroland "names" with close ties to the institutions. The European Movement, for example, wants "a united, federal Europe", is led by former European parliament president Pat Cox and is stuffed with other European grandees. The commission gave it nearly £2m between 2005 and 2007.

Federalist organisations receiving lesser sums, meanwhile, include the Trans-European Policy Studies Association (which promises members "easy access to European political actors and institutions"), the Union of European Federalists (given £266,000 between 2005 and 2007 while undertaking to make the "European constitutional process" a "success"), and the Young European Federalists, who want to "overcome the problem created by the present political and economic structure of centralised nation states."

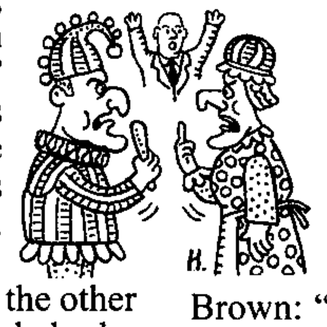
Furthermore, money is also handed to "think-tanks" with extensive corporate memberships that organise events to bring those members closer to the EU institutions. Foremost among these are the European Policy Centre (which received £290,000 between 2005 and 2007) and Friends of Europe (£297,000 – its board of trustees includes one P. Mandelson).

But organisations resisting further European integration and federalism? Surprisingly, these were absent from the list.

CALLED TO ORDURE

GORDON BROWN promised a more honest politics which respected parliament, but it has not happened. Broon is so feeble at prime minister's questions that emergency measures have had to be taken. The "planted question" is back.

Planted questions are patsy inquiries by MPs, normally drafted by the whips, which allow the minister at the despatch box to take a free hit. The "Blair Babes" were embarrassingly compliant in this regard, but when Mr Tony left there was a brief hope that the Commons would rediscover some self-respect. Fat chance!



Take the first contribution at PMQs the other day. It fell to Robert Flello, a chunky lad who represents Stoke-on-Trent South. In front of a packed house, Flello started to put his question to the PM: "Despite a decade of economic stability with low inflation and low interest rates, my constituents…" He got no further into this grovel before the House fell about with derisive laughter. Even the Speaker, Michael Martin, joined in, sarcastically asking MPs to be quiet so Flello could "give his good news". More laughter.

Flello, not twigging that Martin was taking the piss, replied: "Thank you, Mr Speaker." He now completed his poser. "Despite those achievements, my constituents are understandably concerned about the way in which global economic issues affect them. How does my right hon. friend feel that these events compare with those of the early 1990s, when Britain was plunged into recession after recession?" A grateful Brown gave a rehearsed answer about the economy and its allegedly bright outlook.

Chief whip Geoff Hoon looked amused by Flello's brown-nosing but even he (who presumably approves such guff beforehand) was blushing when rookie Labour MP Phil Wilson took the floor to ask: "Does my right hon. friend agree that we can invest £8.4bn in the supply of social housing over the next three years because of this government's sound stewardship of the economy, which is very different from the Tory record? It is because of their neglect that there was a £19bn housing repair bill when they left office." Mr Brown, you will be amazed to hear, was indeed able to agree with this piercing analysis. Wilson's predecessor as MP for Sedgefield, Tony Blair, would have been delighted by such an unutterably wet question. Whether or not his constituents feel well served by their new MP is a different matter.

More worrying is the fact that comparatively experienced MPs are also coming over all loyal. Jeff Ennis, a walrus-moustached timeserver from Barnsley who has been an MP since 1996 and must know he hasn't a hope of becoming a junior minister, asked Brown: "May I ask the prime minister whether he is aware of the very positive impact that this government's housing market renewal programme is having in former mining areas?" Opposition MPs rolled around, yelling: "Answer that if you can!"

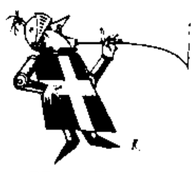
For a lesson in how to hold a minister to account we had to go to the House of Lords, where the bow-tied Earl of Onslow, a drawling amateur whose voice sounds as though it has been steeped in vintage port, spear-tackled environment minister Lord Rooker. Veteran parliamentarian Rooker was putting forward the climate change bill. Onslow realised that the minister didn't have a clue what he was talking about.

With impeccable manners the earl asked a devastatingly simple question. "Which units are used in carbon trading?" he enquired with fruity innocence. "And how does a carbon trading system work?"

See column 858 of the House of Lords Hansard, dated 9 January, for the full glory of a long spiel of meaningless, frantic bullshit by Rooker. Onslow clinched his victory by saying amiably: "Hands up anybody who understood a single word of that."

If environment ministers don't understand the carbon trading system, what *do* they understand?

'Gavel Basher'



EYE TOLD YOU SO (AGAIN)

THE IT project created to link offender records across the criminal justice system and enable prisons and the probation service to share information will not now link them together after all.

It was envisaged that the C-Nomis project would help avoid tragedies like the death of Zahid Mubarek, killed while on remand in Feltham in 2000 by a violent and sometimes racist psychopath, Robert Stewart, who was put in a cell with Mr Mubarek (see *Eyes passim*). Mr Mubarek died at least partly, said C-Nomis's chief back in 2006, because prisons are unable to assess risks among offenders.

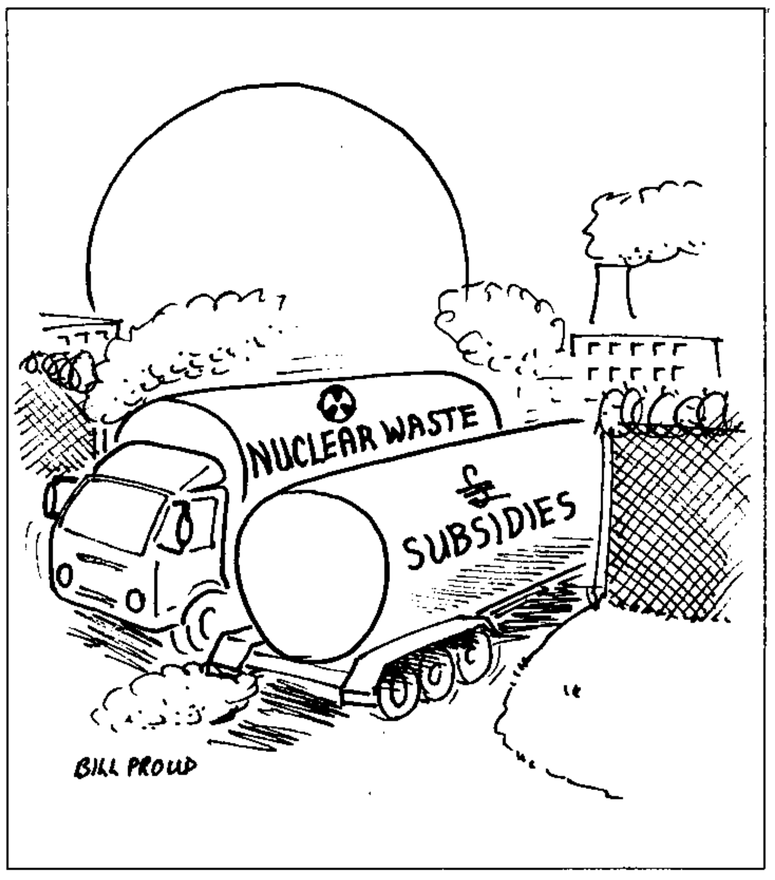
While C-Nomis would have linked various branches of the criminal justice system, allowing prisons and probation workers to know who they were getting, when and why, and what risks they posed, the project floundered, with IT contractors unable to make the system work for both the prison and probation service. In the end, prisons minister David Hanson ordered a moratorium on it last August. *Eye* 1191 said the Ministry of Justice would almost certainly not cancel the project, as £70m (less VAT) had already been spent (a figure that now looks more like £155m). Instead, we suggested, the government was more likely to make a half-arsed decision to carry on with it, but only on the prisons side, making a mockery of the whole idea.

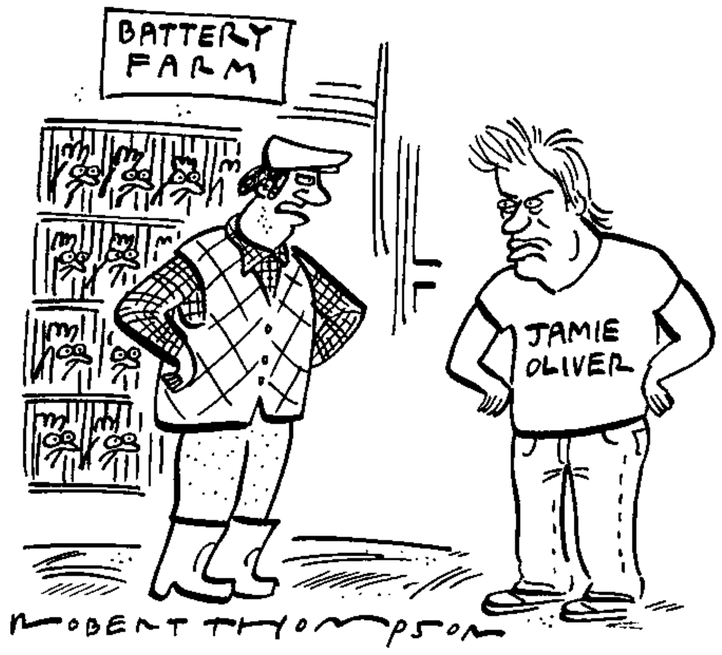
Lo and behold, the MoJ has now decided that C-Nomis will be introduced in prisons only and not extended to the probation service. Mr Hanson said the intention was still to enable "more efficient and effective" management of offenders – but how this will come about is anyone's guess.

PRISON watchdogs are concerned at a sudden spate of suicides in Whitemoor top-security jail in Cambridgeshire. In the past 14 months, five inmates have killed themselves.

Such deaths are more normally associated with the large overcrowded local prisons, which have a high turnover of inmates, and rarer in the more settled populations of the country's eight maximum-security jails. In fact, in the previous five years, Whitemoor had witnessed none.

Why the sudden cluster of deaths and insider reports of an increase in bullying? Have the jail's new senior staff got any answers?





"Oi! Are you looking at my birds?"

Down on the Farm

IT'S often said that the best way to hide embarrassing political information is to publish it in a written parliamentary answer. And so it was when the independent Labour peer Lord Stoddart of Swindon tried to find out recently how much has been lost to taxpayers by Defra's almighty cock-up in failing to pass on EU farming subsidies to English farmers in 2005 and 2006.

This column has reported several times on what is one of the most grotesque examples of maladministration any British government has ever been caught out in. The root of the problem, as a committee of MPs found last year, was that Margaret Beckett, when she was in charge of Defra, had personally chosen the most complicated of the various methods suggested for doling out the subsidies. It was then made much worse by contracting out the design of the system to a firm of consultants, Accenture, which first charged £18m to set it up and then, when it all went belly-up, was given another £19m to sort out the mess it itself had created.

These were mere incidental expenses, however, compared to what happened when Brussels learned that most of the money it had given the Treasury had not been passed on to farmers. Two years running the EU commission fined the UK for late payments and other breaches of the rules. But what then became something of a mystery was the precise size of the bill UK taxpayers were left to pay as a result, and it was this figure Lord Stoddart asked the government to reveal.

The answer, given in Hansard on 8 January and ignored by the media, was that the fines paid so far amount to £63m. But Defra revealed that it has also had to set aside a further £355m to pay fines for late payments and other offences, bringing the grand total to a staggering £418m.

Such is the possible bill for all Defra's cock-ups to date – to make up for which it has already had to slash various parts of its budget for other vital tasks, such as providing flood defences and keeping the canal system in good repair. And since MPs were told last year that this shambles might not be finally sorted out before 2012, we can expect the final bill to rise even higher.

But this remarkable revelation was not the only nugget of information to emerge from recent parliamentary answers. Another device used by Defra to help make up this massive shortfall was to offer hundreds of its officials early retirement. In answers given to Tory MP Peter Ainsworth on 10 January, the junior farming minister Jonathan Shaw revealed that 372 officials had so far taken up the offer – the bill for which this year alone will amount to a further £47m. So, adding up the fines from Brussels, pay-offs to Defra's goons for early retirement and Accenture's bonus for its incompetence, the total bill we must all pay for sorting out Mrs Beckett's shambles comes (so far) to nearly £500m, around £20 for every taxpayer in the land. Not bad for a woman who rarely bothered to hide the contempt she felt for Britain's farmers.

'Muckspreader'

ITV

Grade's New Schedule (ITV1)

IN football these days, managers get about three matches to prove they are the right man for the job. But because it takes longer to make a TV show than to yell at the centre-backs, the period of grace for new executives in television is a year.

Until then, you can blame the commissions of your predecessor. But the January 2008 schedules on ITV1 are, without argument, Michael Grade's. This is his vision of what he wants the channel to be and viewers, reviewers and advertisers must decide if they buy it.

Given the City was nervous that Gradey might be too much a figure from TV's past, his first big move was risky. Two years after he retired to spend more time watching cricket, Sir Trevor has been enticed back to front **News at Ten**, the old ITN war-horse, restored to the symbolic time-slot from which it was shunted in 1999.

Only considerable amounts of flattery or alimony can have persuaded Sir Trev that it was a good idea to come back. His retirement was a sensible move because, even two years ago, he was an old-fashioned headline-reader in a world where anchors are increasingly expected to do some reporting and interviewing.

But so bad is his record in those areas that, even on the launch night, all the show-off pieces (a report from Antarctica, an interview with the surgeon who shagged Diana) were done by someone else. Sky News buy-in Julie Etchingham has been recruited to sit alongside him; but she is given about as much to do as Dr Who's girl assistants in the old days.

This is so totally Sir Trevor's show that the general impression given by the bulletins is of a TV veteran trying to pretend that time has stopped. Which might not be quite the brand signal that Gradey wants to be sending.

Apart from news, his other favourite calling-card in the past has been classy drama; and the press releases for the new year schedule specifically promised less soap froth and more mind-baths in this department.

Honest, a six-parter about a London crime family who try to go on the strater-narrer, may not be the best flagship for such a policy. This is the kind of jokey mockney underworld romp ITV has been making for about 20 years although the script is admittedly filthier than the old IBA would have passed: a running gag in the opening show involved a lad trying to become supple enough to suck himself off. Otherwise, it's business as usual. The brassy gold-hearted matriarch, who would once have been played by Ann Mitchell or Barbara Windsor, now goes to Amanda Redman.

The paired half-hour dramas **Moving Wallpaper** and **Echo Beach** are certainly a bold declaration of intent. This is the kind of arty-laughy conceit that even BBC2 or Channel 4 would hesitate to run in peak-time. At 9pm, Ben Miller plays the comically insensitive hatchet-man sent to sort out a struggling peak-time soap opera, while, at 9.30pm, we get the rubbish sudser itself. In the first half, the mad producer declares that he wants a part for Jason Donovan; in the second half, there is Jase, hamming it up in Cornwall.

There are loads of in-jokes including the mad producer head-butting a photo of Gradey on the office wall – but a satire of executive interference in television seems to have been executively interfered with itself. How else to explain why a reasonably cruel gag about Ant & Dec is instantly followed by a character saying "only joking, lads"? And, if one half of the double-bill does better than the other, the network either has to kill the point by separating them or else kill off a healthy section?

If *Moving Wallpaper / Echo Beach* is a soap trying to pass itself off as a satire about soap, **The Palace** tries a similar trick. Set among a fictional British royal family – where the young prince Richard is about to become Richard IV, following the death of his father the king – this is really *Dynasty,* with lots of rich, shagging bimbos, but initially seems more dangerous because Richard is so clearly Prince William and his feckless brother George a surrogate for Harry.

But, as the show settles down, it settles for increasingly cheap targets, like the behaviour of the tabloid press. Indeed, rather worryingly, it follows *Moving Wallpaper* in seeing television itself as a juicy subject for television drama. The new king gives a sensational live interview to ITV, a sequence which is completely unbelievable in every way but allows a crack in the dialogue about how the BBC would have done a really sycophantic interview whereas ITV gave him hell. Yeah, sure. If William ever gets the throne, ITV will have Sir Trevor prostrate before him or, if he happens to be unavailable, Sir Ant and Sir Dec.

The Geordie jokers are not yet represented in the new schedule, possibly sulking after Grade tried to keep them out of the clink over the phone-in scandal by saying that their executive producer credits were just vanity. While the lads executive produce their next project, entertainment is represented by **Dancing on Ice**, which is just *Strictly Come Dancing* on skates and so short of genuine celebrity contestants that two thirds of the competing dozen are either current or past TV presenters. The second series of a show that ripped off a BBC one in the first place is also a poor advertisement for the brave new ITV Gradey promised. If advertisers and audiences buy this schedule, we can only assume they're on a kick-back from the phone-lines.

'Remote Controller'

LUVVIES

"The last day of shooting is surreal. Your mind, your body, your spirit are not prepared to accept that this experience is coming to an end. You've devoted so much of your time to unleashing, in an unconscious way, some sort of spiritual turmoil, and even if it's uncomfortable, no part of you wishes to leave that character behind. The sense of bereavement is such that it can take years before you can put it to rest."

DANIEL DAY-LEWIS
Telegraph magazine

Submitted by J. James.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

DUMB BRITAIN

Celebrity Mastermind, BBC1

John Humphrys: Which type of owl, with a distinctive white face, is named after the farm building where it nests?

Yvette Fielding: The snowy owl.

JH: When the Ashmolean opened in Beaumont Street in Oxford in 1683, it was the first public what?

Bill Kenwright: Convenience.

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: In the USA an unidentified dead body is sometimes known as a John what?

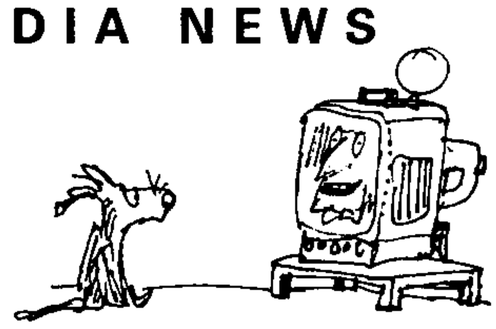
Contestant: Wayne.

TalkSport Radio

Mike Parry: How many Christmases took place during the Second World War?

Contestant: Fifty-eight.

MEDIA NEWS



COVERAGE of the crash-landing of a BA jet at Heathrow on the 6pm BBC News lasted a full 16 of the available 25 minutes.

Robert Hall and John Sopel both delivered live reports from either side of the airport. Then there was a package and interview with Nick Robinson, who had been on Gordon Brown's slightly delayed plane; then some vox pops and interviews with the same people vox-popped.

Next came a reminder that investigators "don't want to speculate" on causes, followed by another package in which Rory Cellan-Jones asked: "So what caused the crash?" After that came an interview with a transport correspondent who revealed that "whatever happened, happened late in the flight".

Finally there was a BBC London story about the crash for local viewers and a reminder that the 10pm bulletin "will have the latest".

GOING LIVE

BBC News 24 wasted no time hailing a cabbie for an illuminating eyewitness account of the Heathrow crash.

"We're joined live now by eyewitness John Rowland, a taxi driver. John, can you describe the moment you saw the plane coming in?"

"Good afternoon, I actually didn't see the plane coming in," revealed the cabbie.

ANOTHER victory for citizen journalism with the revelations of Jason Johnson, introduced by Kay Burley on Sky News as "a passenger on the plane that crashed" at Heathrow last week.

"We came in very, very fast. It's something I've never been in before," the Australian gushed over the phone. "Once it landed, it spun 90 degrees. I felt like I was in a washing machine."

Johnson's eyewitness account was packaged and rerun on the rolling news channel – until he emailed producers to 'fess up that he hadn't been anywhere near Heathrow and had just been "a bit pissed and thought it might be quite funny".

The first confirmation that he was a fake came via Australian channel Nine Network at 11pm British time. But the following morning saw the *Daily Mail, Telegraph, Guardian, Independent* and *Mirror* all hit the streets with testimony from Johnson on his experiences on board flight BA38.

OUTRAGED politicians in Northern Ireland are waiting to hear if the BBC is to discipline one of its editors over a conflict of interest. This follows the *Eye*'s revelation that Mike Cairns, a key executive in the corporation's newsgathering team in the province, moonlighted for the RAF as a spin doctor (see *Eye* 1192).

By day, Cairns was a mild-mannered editor, but by night, at the weekend and during an extra week's holiday from the corporation he was Wing Commander Michael "Biggles" Cairns, commanding officer of 7644 Squadron, RAF Volunteer Reserve. His part-time job involved training top military personnel how to "handle" tough questions from, er, BBC reporters, and making training videos featuring BBC footage with a market value of many thousands of pounds. A member of the Northern Ireland Assembly's culture committee, Paul Maskey, urged Cairns to resign from the corporation, calling his position "untenable".

Highly significant in the politics of the troubled province was that Cairns, while a high-ranking military officer, was responsible for weekly political output across a radio and television region, and for supervising the BBC NI political editor. BBC bosses belatedly checked their own guidelines, which ban hacks from giving media training on the side, and ordered Biggles to choose between editing or spin-doctoring. Patriotic to the last, he chose the day job over the weekend role.

The BBC confirms that Cairns has "decided to stand down from the reserve to avoid any perception of a conflict of interest", though it has yet to say if he will be disciplined. But he is still in contact with his old chums, attending a recent squadron dinner in London as a guest of honour, and has not ruled out resuming a forces career when the fuss dies down. Trebles all round in the officers' mess, once more!

MORE troubling news from the listing Qatar-based satellite TV station, Al Jazeera English, where another 13 members of staff have already packed their bags this year, appalled at flimsy contracts and miserable working conditions.

Yet more staff are considering escape plans as two-year contracts come to an end, along with benefit cuts and wage freezes. Morale was dented further when managing director Nigel Parsons admitted to a furious gathering of staff in Doha that he is not even invited to Al Jazeera board meetings, instead relying on information from his secretary, who is friendly with another secretary who *does* get to board meetings.

Parsons' weakness is what endears him to his Arab bosses, for they control Al Jazeera Arabic and now control Al Jazeera English. Many of the expats have now served their purpose – apart from the well-paid Parsons, of course.

Parsons was ambushed at the staff meeting by furious hacks demanding to know why nobody had been issued with a contract since 2006 and why promised employment benefits were now no longer guaranteed or available. Why had the promised two flights home turned out to be just one? Why had the pledges to pay school fees (exorbitant in Qatar) evaporated in the desert sun?

Parsons (salary: $2m) has been sidelined by the Emir of Qatar's henchmen to such a degree he now wanders around the Doha newsroom grinning inanely; hence his nickname of "Prince Charles". To cap it all he can now look forward to legal action from Jo Burgin, AJE's planning head whose sacking he reluctantly had to agree to. Burgin is married to Parsons' chum, AJE managing editor Steve Clark, and it remains to be seen whether she compels her hubby to testify for her.

"I'm amazed we haven't got our own page in *Private Eye* yet," said Parsons at the staff meeting. You're getting there, Nigel...

SINCE Denise Van Outen left Channel 4's *The Big Breakfast*, which she co-presented with Johnny Vaughan, in 1999, the pair have repeatedly been reunited with remarkable audience-shedding consequences.

Most recently this was for the ill-fated Saturday-night BBC1 show *Johnny and Denise: Passport to Paradise*, once beaten in the ratings by a 17-year-old *Miss Marple* repeat on BBC2. So who has Capital radio chosen as Vaughan's new co-presenter for his ailing breakfast show? "It's going to be fantastic to work with Johnny again and undoubtedly great fun," says Van Outen with weary familiarity.

AD NAUSEAM

JAMIE OLIVER is paid £1.2m a year by Sainsbury's to promote its products. But he also gets a fair wodge from Channel 4 to front its programmes. Can a servant to two masters please both?

On *Jamie's Fowl Dinners*, Oliver criticised Sainsbury's for not turning up to a televised debate on poultry farming. There followed what has been called "a tense telephone conversation" between Oliver and Sainsbury's CEO Justin King, which, we were asked to imagine, consisted of King giving Oliver an oven-roasting. Oliver, it was then widely reported, wrote an open letter to every single Sainsbury's member of staff, apologising.

In fact, it's as likely that Oliver and King's conversation was one of mutual congratulation. As King said of his stooge the next day: "His independence of mind and preparedness to stand up and be vocal is what makes him so valuable."

In truth, King will be unperturbed: Oliver's street cred on telly is as important to Sainsbury's as its chicken sales. That letter of apology, we can safely say, will have been drafted by Sainsbury's PR department.

ALISON Jackson, the photographer who has made a small fortune using lookalikes in risqué mock-ups for comic effect, appeared on the *Today* programme last week bemoaning how she couldn't find a decent Gordon Brown double.

This will come as something of a surprise to Schweppes and its agency Mother, who employed Jackson at considerable expense for a recent Christmas campaign. One of her posters featured Tony Blair and, er, Gordon Brown pulling a cracker. Did Jackson tell them she was using a second-rate Gordon, or did she decide to keep it Sch...?

"It's awful – the chickens sit around eating until they're so fat their legs won't support their bodyweight"

BRITISH COUNCIL

WHILE the British Council has been fighting its corner to remain in Russia, elsewhere in the world it seems only too willing to shut up shop.

In **India** the council announced last month that it was closing the libraries it runs in Thiruvananthapuram and Bhopal. The decision came as a completé shock to library staff and the Indian Medical Association described the potential loss of the library's collection of books and journals as "a major blow" to medical students.

The Keralan state government is trying to find a way to keep the library open in Thiruvananthapuram and has said it is prepared to run the library itself, if the British Council will just agree to leave behind its books and equipment.

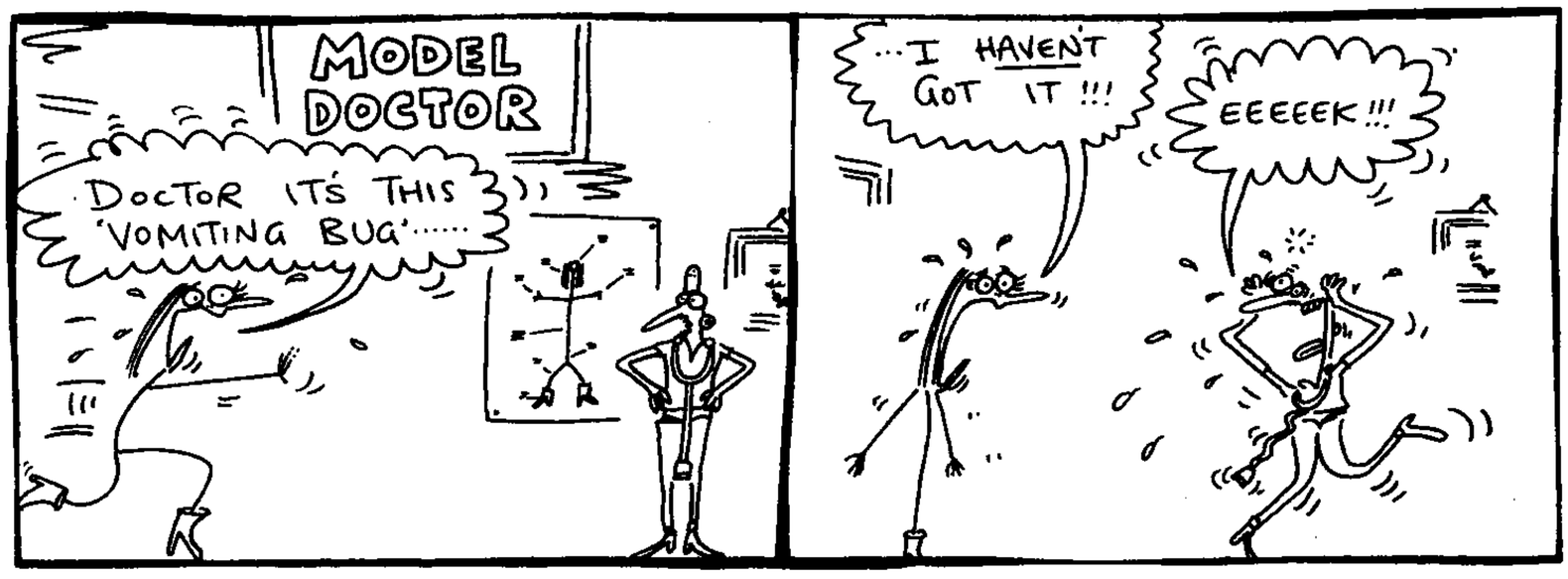
The council says it "is changing the nature of its work" in the region and instead of the library, it would be sending Education UK councillors "to hold public seminars in popular venues" in Bhopal, Indore and Thiruvananthapuram. The role of Education UK is to attract international students (and their fees) to British universities, so these seminars will be recruitment exercises, not educational events.

Meanwhile in **Malaysia**, the council told readers that the last date to borrow books from its library in Kuala Lumpur was 15 April, claiming that it is no longer needed because residents of the Klang Valley have wide access to information via other libraries and bookstores "as well as the internet". Not to worry though, the council reassured, it will continue to "provide useful reading materials on UK universities" and tourist information about Britain at their offices.

All this follows the closure of offices in **Nigeria** (see *Eye* 1120) and the bizarre move into a reality TV scholarship contest in **Ghana** (Eye 1196). The British Council continues to declare that its purpose is to win friends for the UK abroad and that its "conviction that cultural relations can help individuals and the world community to thrive, [makes] the British Council a good partner". But it is becoming increasingly clear its main aim is to sign up lucrative foreign students for UK universities.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER



In The Courts

HIGH COURT judge David Eady could earn himself a footnote in legal history by changing the law – in America.

Mr Justice Eady's dotty and oppressive rulings against US authors and journalists in the British libel courts have so irritated opinion across the Atlantic that a senior politician has introduced a bill in the New York state legislature that would protect American writers from litigious "libel tourists" such as Saudi billionaire Khalid bin Mahfouz (*Eyes passim*).

Mahfouz has discovered that Eady is happy to help him suppress books that are critical of him, even if they are not published here. In 2005 Eady awarded Mahfouz substantial damages and costs against Deborah Ehrenfeld, whose book *Funding Evil*, which wasn't on sale in the UK, alleged that $270,000 of Mahfouz's money had found its way to al-Qaeda. Eady also ordered Ehrenfeld to apologise and destroy all copies of the book. Ehrenfeld's publishers are standing their ground, but two other books by US academics, containing similar allegations, but not published here, have been pulped following Eady rulings in London.

Ehrenfeld sought a court order last month protecting her right of free speech under the first amendment of the US constitution, but in a blow to the author the New York court of appeals ruled that it does *not* have jurisdiction to protect Americans from foreign defamation judgments.

Hence New York state assemblyman Rory Lancman's introduction last week of the "Libel Terrorism Protection Act" which would protect authors in New York state from British judges like Eady. "When US journalists and authors can be hauled into kangaroo courts on phoney-baloney libel charges in overseas jurisdictions who don't share our belief in freedom of speech or a free press, all of us are threatened and our war effort is weakened," Lancman said.

Mahfouz, by the by, does not deny making a donation to armed Islamists, although his lawyers insist it "was to assist the US-sponsored resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and was never intended nor, to the best of Sheikh Khalid's knowledge, ever used to fund any 'extension' of that resistance movement."

'Ratbiter'

BLOODY SOME-DAY

NEXT week sees the 36th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, but the relatives of those killed in Londonderry are still waiting for the results of Lord Saville's inquiry, launched ten years ago in April.

The latest estimate is that Saville and his two retired judicial colleagues will report in "a matter of months". The tribunal will still give no firm date for when the report will be completed or published. Saville and chums have taken more than three years to write their "voluminous" report since the hearings ended in November 2004. Why it has taken so long mystifies lawyers involved.

When the tribunal finally fell silent in 2004, the official line was that the report was "expected next summer". Three summers have now passed and it may be a fourth before it appears. The tribunal will not say whether Saville was writing the main report, to be amended by his colleagues, or if he was writing it as the hearings progressed, or whether they were each writing a version to be combined later.

All that *is* clear is that the entire exercise has cost more than £172m – including a £93m payday for lawyers. Michael Mansfield QC, that relentless pursuer of truth at the Diana inquest, managed to earn a mere £562,000 on behalf of some of the 14 victims' families, but this pales when compared with more than £4m each for tribunal counsel Sir Christopher Clarke and MoD QC Edwin Glasgow – or £12.5m for tribunal solicitor, Eversheds.

"Everyone will laugh at us," declared a tribunal official. But the bad joke is on the taxpayer, who may face even further costs if – as seems likely, just as with the Diana inquest – Lord Saville's overdue verdict is not to everybody's liking.

"Murder? You do realise that if you do that again you'll be in serious trouble young man!"

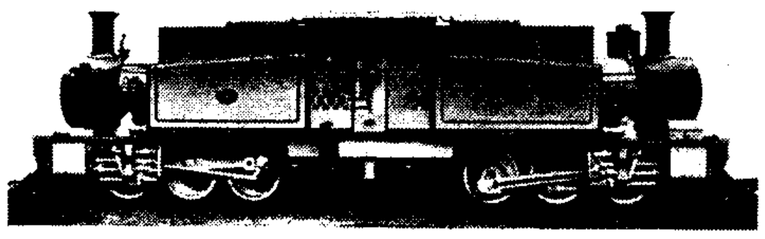
FAMILY VALUES

FEARS that injustice is taking place behind the closed door of the family courts, which handle the most sensitive child custody cases, is fuelling demands that they should be open to public scrutiny – provided the identity of children involved is protected.

It is not just that medical and expert evidence may be going unchallenged, or that lessons learned in one case cannot be passed on to others. One custody case due to come before the high court raises serious allegations against a senior official responsible for court and child cases.

This latter case involves a child brought illegally into the country from Kenya by an affluent middle-age couple. They claim that they took unofficial advice about how to exploit a loophole in the law governing adoptions from abroad from a close relative, who just happens to work for the Department of Children, Schools and Families. It centred on how and when the child was to be registered with the local authority.

The official, who has warned his employers about the case, denies the allegation and claims that he properly told the couple what steps they had to take to comply with the law. But of course as family courts are held in secret – and the government recently abandoned plans to let the media publish anonymised reports – we may never learn the truth of these claims.



SIGNAL FAILURES

All a bit rich

WHY is it taking Brits so long to understand that the prime purpose of public service is personal enrichment, not serving the public? In the week that Tony Blair cashed in on his premiership with JP Morgan, there were grumbles about the money pocketed by individuals in the dysfunctional rail system Blair bequeathed.

The *Sunday Times* said Stagecoach boss Brian Souter paid himself £1m last year; and contrasted pisspoor service and whopping fare rises on First Great Western with the £745,000 pay received by Moir Lockhead, the chief of parent company FirstGroup. It didn't have space to discuss the £24m pocketed (in one year) by Richard Branson for franchises bailed out with massive public cash after Beardie failed to deliver on his promises (see *Eye* 1201). Nor to show how the new London-Sunderland service by Grand Central was blocked by rail regulator Tom Winsor – the same Tom Winsor who, after leaving his post, made a tidy sum advising Grand Central (*Eye* 1160). Nor to explain that FGW's delays were partly down to incompetence at Network Rail, where four directors pocketed £286,000 in performance bonuses.

Opposition MPs were eager to criticise. Even the Tories, who replaced British Rail with a seething mass of conflicting shareholder interests, joined in: North Thanet MP Roger Gale told *Kent on Sunday* that unless Southeastern improved, the chief executive and his "miserable cohorts" should surrender the franchise. Other critics have suggested terminating FGW's franchise.

The underlying assumption is that remuneration should reflect the performance encountered by passengers. The official "public performance measure" of train punctuality is disseminated regularly, but merely as an academic exercise: no franchise has been curtailed because of delays or mass cancellations. The only "performance" that really matters in the privatised railway industry is financial. And so in that narrow context, Labour's policy of pricing people off trains instead of increasing capacity makes sense.

Also in that context, where improving services is a waste of potential dividends, FGW is a model franchise. In January 2007, then-FGW boss Alison Forster apologised for not meeting customers' expectations and insisted: "Our team has been working hard to implement measures to improve our services." So hard that last month new FGW boss Andrew Haines apologised to passengers again: "Over the last few weeks we've not been giving you the service you deserve."

As money is all that counts, Lockhead deserved his £254,000 performance-related bonus, the performance in question being FirstGroup's rising profits. Go-Ahead (the main partner at Southeastern) and Virgin also made bigger profits from UK trains.

BAD news for Transport Secretary Ruth Kelly, whose main duty is apparently to nurture air-travel growth. The Civil Aviation Authority reports that growth has slowed as more people choose the train instead.

Labour has parallel policies: expand airports to meet and stimulate growth; and refuse to increase rail capacity in line with past growth and (understated) forecasts. Air fares have fallen under Labour (*Eye* 1168), which keeps raising rail fares faster than inflation. Even so, the CAA says airlines are still losing ground where they compete with trains such as the tilting Pendolinos.

Labour is desperate not to make that connection (omitting any reference to rail competition in its Heathrow expansion plan – *Eye* 1199), otherwise rail investment becomes the obvious alternative to airport expansion. On the day the CAA dropped its bombshell, Kelly's department said that adding two coaches to each Pendolino train for expected growth would be poor value for money. Hardly surprising, when the carriages would be procured through one of the rolling stock firms the government reckons make too much profit, and when Virgin's proposal for extra carriages rests on a two-year extension to a franchise that recently had a massive subsidy rise.

Labour has buggered up the railways to the point where extra carriages to make the most of the £8bn west-coast mainline renewal are now unaffordable. And it makes less sense to simplify the rail industry than to give Heathrow a third runway and sixth terminal – to handle extra flights for all those people who won't be able to use trains from London to Manchester and Glasgow. Brilliant!

'Dr B Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

OILING THE WALES

EIGHT months after Newham council's chief executive Dave Burbage suddenly announced his "retirement", the "Olympic borough" still hasn't found a replacement - despite offering a handsome £200,000 salary.

Not that there is any lack of interest in a job the elected mayor, Sir Robin Wales, describes as "a huge challenge", aimed at "the complete transformation of this borough and the life chances of its people".

To find Burbage's replacement, Newham hired headhunters Rockpools, whose directors include former local government minister Nick Raynsford. In 2006 Rockpools pocketed £1.9m in "consultancy" fees from the Olympic Delivery Authority, leading the Tories to detect a "whiff of sleaze" because as a minister Raynsford would have been privy to confidential information about London's Olympic bid.

Rockpools boss Hamish Davidson, a fan of "blue-sky thinking", is Sir Robin's kind of guy. Instead of producing a shortlist of experienced local government officers, he came up with a selection of candidates mostly with business backgrounds. The job went to one Roger Tucker, whose experience in, er, oil prospecting was clearly just what one of Britain's most deprived boroughs needed. Perhaps Sir Robin hoped to strike black gold in Canning Town. Certainly he was delighted, and boasted of the "outside the box" appointment to Labour chums.

It took a junior employee in Newham's human resources department to Google Mr Tucker and ask some pertinent questions about his CV. After running oil exploration company Lasmo's operation in Venezuela, Tucker became managing director of Yukos, the Russian oil company which fell foul of the Kremlin and whose boss, oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, is now in a Siberian labour camp after copping nine years for fraud and tax evasion. Tucker then became chief executive of African Arabian Oil, a company owned by the Qatari royal family, which prospected for oil in southern Sudan in partnership with the Chinese national oil company. China buys most of Sudan's oil and has been criticised by human rights groups for selling arms to the Sudanese regime that are used against minorities in Darfur and elsewhere.

It was the Sudan connection that finally persuaded Sir Robin he had perhaps thought too far "out of the box", and the job offer was quietly withdrawn. The position is now being readvertised by Rockpools' rivals GatenbySanderson.

● NO SOONER had the sniggering over Sir Robin's shambolic recruitment drive died down than the long-running farce of Newham's parks constabulary, aka the Keystone Cops (*Eyes passim*), left another layer of egg on the bespattered mayoral face. After *Eye* 1200 published a CCTV still of a uniformed Keystone illegally issuing a police "stop and search" form to a newsagent because he had not produced his business waste contract on demand, the Keystones were ordered to stop issuing the forms, and also not to arrest anyone, "until the dust settles". Concern over their antics must have reached Whitehall, for Wales was summoned at short notice to the Home Office for a meeting last week. Evenin' all!

WIGHT MOVE

NEWHAM'S former chief exec Dave Burbage is enjoying his "retirement" on the Isle of Wight. But he's not spending much time playing bowls or tending his roses, because he has a new job: as Isle of Wight council's acting director of finance.

This follows the departure of Paul Wilkinson during the Undercliff Drive coastal erosion contract scandal (*Eyes passim*). In fact Burbage now has two jobs, as he has also stepped into the shoes of deputy chief executive John Lawson, another Undercliff Drive victim.

At least the island has put the scandal, in which millions of pounds' worth of work was awarded to engineering consultants High-Point Rendel without a proper tendering process, behind it. But what's this? The long-delayed revamp of Ryde's decrepit seafront bus-train-ferry interchange, worth more than £6m to contractors Dyer and Butler, has been postponed for at least 18 months and project manager Ian Schaff has been suspended. Some problem about the tendering procedure, or lack of one, apparently. Oh dear!

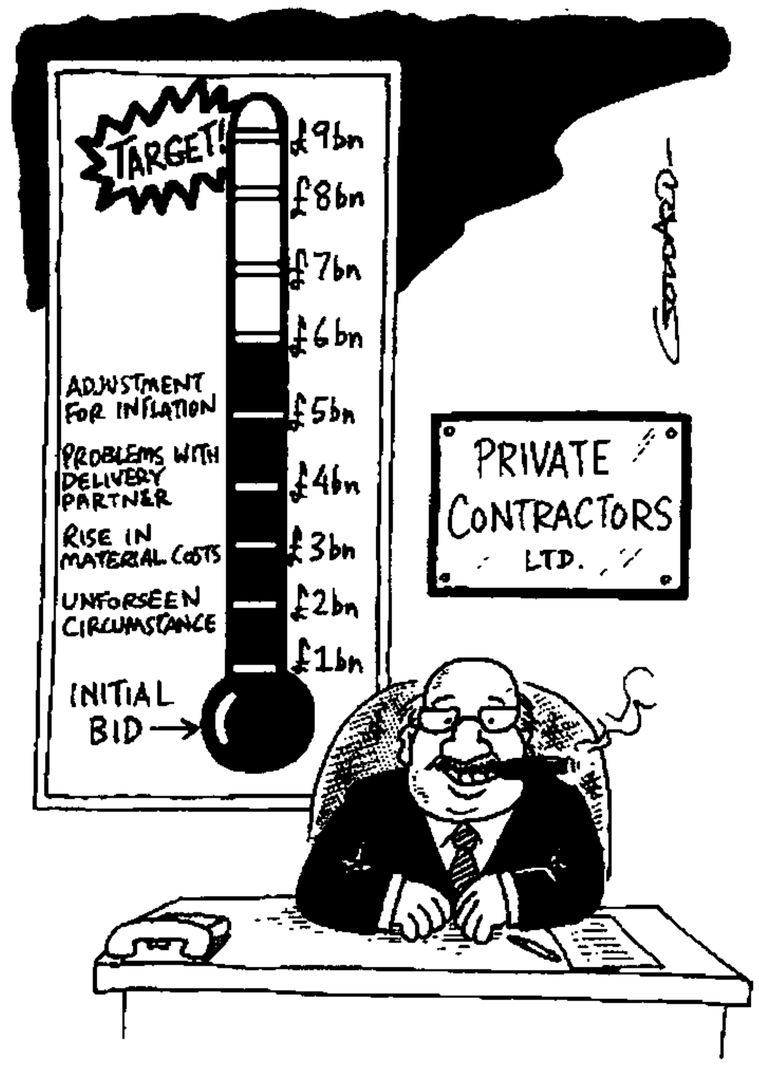
GREED IS THE WORD

BRITAIN'S millions of council workers, who are seeking a 6 percent rise after years of below-inflation wage increases, will no doubt be subject to much vilification in the press before being beaten into accepting not-a-lot-more than the 2 percent Gordon Broon has in mind for them.

Yet while the workers are accused of greed for attempting to get their starting pay up from £6 to £6.50 an hour, their masters seem to have no difficulty obtaining far greater, inflation-busting rises.

Rob Whiteman, chief executive of Labour Barking and Dagenham council, recently trousered a £35,000 bonus on top of his £200,000 salary, for "exceeding his performance targets". "Sponge Bob" as he is affectionately known to staff, has now co-opted one of the council's postal delivery drivers to be his personal chauffeur, driving him around Dagenham in a Ford (of course) limo that used to be the mayor's car.

● MEANWHILE, the ruling Tories on West Sussex county council have awarded themselves rises of up to 27 percent in their allowances, backdated to 1 April last year. "Tory Boy" council leader Henry Smith,



who is also the Conservative prospective parliamentary candidate for Crawley (where he came within 37 votes of unseating Labour's Laura Moffatt in 2005), gets a relatively modest 11 percent increase in his "special allowances" from £26,523 to £29,394 per annum. Not, of course, that it is not richly deserved. Last month Smith told local hacks that he works 60 hours a week on his council duties. "Were I to take a role with similar responsibilities within the private sector, the salary would be far higher," he added. Crawley's voters are full of admiration, for after Smith has put in 60 hours on their behalf, he also somehow manages to run, according to the Tories' website, "his own property investment business". What a man!

BRUM DEAL

SHOWING the way on town hall pay is Birmingham city council, where the ruling Lib Dem/Tory coalition has conducted a review which aims to make pay "fairer" – by cutting the salaries of thousands of staff.

Eighty-one people are having their pay cut by more than £16,000 a year, while another 4,456 will lose up to £10,000. The review was meant to equalise pay levels between men and women, but the unions claim women are bearing the brunt of the pay cuts. The man presiding over the shambles is Tory cabinet member Alan Rudge, who now perhaps regrets saying last year that the number of people who would lose out substantially could be "counted on the fingers of one hand".

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

THE London borough of Waltham Forest certainly can pick 'em.

Back in 2001 one of the bidders to take over its education services offered the then deputy director of education £5,000 (*Eye* 1028). That firm withdrew and the contract was won by EduAction. After a rocky start (its antics in trying to privatise a school for blind children featured in *Eye* 1093), EduAction got its act together and last year Waltham Forest was the top LEA in the country for "value-added" performance.

Time for a change, then, as Waltham Forest revealed that EduAction is no longer to run school improvement, admissions and grant services. Step forward preferred bidder VT Education and Skills, part of the VT Group – better known as Vosper Thorneycroft, one of the world's biggest arms companies! VT builds Britain's battleships and America's army helicopters and is hoping to supply the Libyans with patrol vessels.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON — KNIFE & PACKER

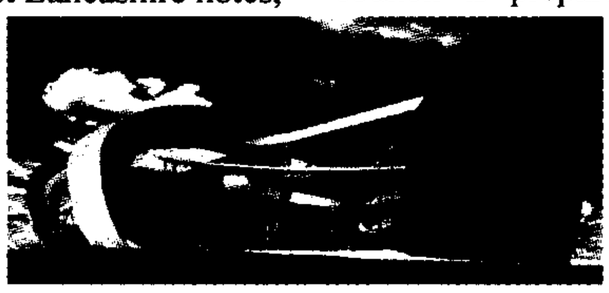
WHAT'S GOING ON, GUYS?!? MY HANDS ARE ON FIRE!!! WHAT KIND OF SOAP IS THAT ???
JUST GO WITH IT, MAX. IT'S THE FIRST PHASE OF THE DEEP CLEANSING PROCESS...
SIZZLE
THROB
I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THAT MANUFACTURING OUR OWN SOAP WAS A MISTAKE...
TAKE THE PAIN AWAY, SOMEBODY!
IT'S AN EMPIRICAL PROCESS, QUIN, WE'RE PUSHING BACK THE FRONTIERS OF MODERN SOAP PRODUCTION WITH NETTLE AND BEESTING...

NOOKS and CORNERS

AFTER the hype, chaos and resignations, Liverpool's reign as European City of Culture 2008 began this month with a smug and self-congratulatory fanfare.

What "culture" actually means to the city council has long been clear from the continuing demolition of historic buildings, the approval of every crass new commercial development and the disfigurement of Pierhead with the gratuitous new Museum of Liverpool building (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*). But the most revealing proposal is perhaps to build a gigantic new football stadium on publicly-owned open space in Stanley Park in Anfield, for which Liverpool's planning committee gave approval in November.

Anfield, north of the city centre, was laid out with terraces of houses in the mid-19th century. With its churches, chapels, schools and pubs, it is, as the new "Pevsner" for south-west Lancashire notes, "a microcosm of the townscape of working-class Victorian suburbia". Its glory is Stanley Park, created with great foresight and opened in 1871.



How it may look: Stanley Park stadium

One of Liverpool's several fine parks, it was laid out by Edward Kemp, a disciple of Paxton. Sir Nikolaus Pevsner himself described it as: "One of the best mid-Victorian parks, not only of Liverpool but of the whole North."

Like so much else in Liverpool, Stanley Park has long been neglected; but it remains beautiful, full of mature trees. And now the city council, which ought to be maintaining it, proposes to hand over – not sell: *give* – a sizeable chunk to Liverpool Football Club.

Liverpool FC's present stadium in Anfield is deemed too small and the proposal to build a much bigger structure in Stanley Park was first mooted in 2001. Liverpool council was enthusiastic, arguing that the stadium would encourage the regeneration of a deprived area and that, as part of the deal, money would go towards restoring the park and Anfield Cemetery (also laid out by Kemp) – both things the council ought to be doing anyway.

Such proposals were at first cautiously approved by English Heritage, although as the scheme slowly proceeded, the benefits seem to have been scaled down. Meanwhile the city was content for local houses to be demolished – including two stone houses which were the oldest surviving in Anfield – while others perished in the government's notorious "Pathfinder" clearances.

The proposal has not enjoyed plain sailing. The first design for the new stadium, by AFL Architects of Manchester, was rejected and an ambitious second scheme, by HKS Architects of Dallas, priced at some £450m, was unveiled last July. The design approved in November was a little more modest, for a 60,000-seater steel structure costing a mere £400m; but the club hopes to expand it to 80,000 capacity with a future planning application. Even this, however, may prove too expensive, as the architects have been asked to make the building cheaper.

Some money will be generated by development of the proposed "Anfield Plaza" around the present stadium. The club promises that the playing field itself will remain an open space, as compensation for the loss of Stanley Park. But this is tiny compared with the park land that will be lost.

Florence Gersten's Save Our City Campaign estimates that at least one-third of Stanley Park will be required for the new stadium and its car parks. Campaigners note that the regeneration proposals include Anfield Cemetery so as to "offer support to informal recreation in the area". But how can a cemetery offer recreation unless cleared of its gravestones and monuments?

The part of Stanley Park which Liverpool council is prepared to give away to American developers is open space where children play and people walk their dogs – important in an area where many houses have no garden? Of course, given the mindless national and local cult of football, people can be found to say that a bigger Anfield stadium is a good thing, and obliging Liverpool FC obviously accords with the bogus populism of the city council; but Steve Radford, the local councillor, has rightly described this as a "monstrous sized development". A public inquiry is needed.

IN MANCHESTER, meanwhile, in the pre-war Wythenshaw housing estate, Baguley Hall has been unoccupied since the 1950s and sits fenced off and gently decaying.

It is a lovely building, most remarkable for its 14th century timber-framed hall with its high-pitched roof. Along with the rest of the estate, the house was acquired in the 1920s by Manchester Corporation, which cleared the farm buildings and drove a road through the walled front garden and surrounded it with shops and houses. In the 1960s it tried to do away with it altogether. Pevsner said the way it treated the hall was "a scandal".

Today Baguley Hall is on English Heritage's Register of Buildings at Risk, where it is noted that it is listed grade I and a Scheduled Ancient Monument, that its condition is "Fair. Vacant", and that its delinquent owner is... English Heritage! This is because Manchester city council, having failed to demolish it or make any effort to use it for the benefit of its citizens, gave it to the Ministry of Works in 1968. Feasibility studies suggested it could become a venue for civil marriages and home to the Manchester Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages. But nothing happened. Baguley Hall remains a scandal.

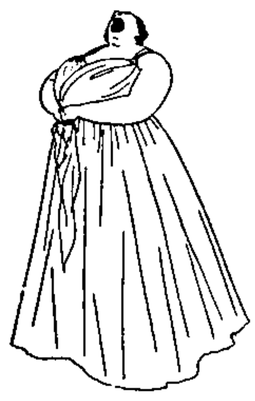
'Piloti'

I-SPY *Heathrow Coach Station*

Submitted by Amy Denman-Johnson. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

A POIGNANT appendage to last week's shock-horror news about EMI shedding a third of its staff is currently on show at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris where, in a special display, are two sealed urns recently unearthed from the foundations of the old Paris Opera at Palais Garnier.



Placed there as time-capsules on Christmas Eve 1907 and marked for opening after 100 years, they contain a cache of early recordings of the great singers of the day – Caruso, Melba, Patti, Calve – made by an operation called the Gramophone Company that was clearly anything but shy about its own significance and keen to flex its muscles in the face of future generations.

Back in 1907 the Gramophone Co, later to be renamed EMI, had plenty of muscle to flex. It signalled all things good, great and exciting in the revolutionary new world of sound technology. It *was* the future.

Now it's suddenly become the past, reduced and humbled. Those two urns look like the trunkless stumps of Ozymandias in the desert. And they're all the sadder for the fact that, when they went on show last month, it was with a trumpeting statement that EMI would replace them with new time-capsules for opening in 2107. The question now is what on earth the company thinks it has to boast about to our far-off descendents? Clinging desperately to life? Er, issuing the odd disc here and there? Repackaging Maria Callas classics of the 1960s for the nth time? Look on my works ye mighty and despair...

THERE wasn't too much to celebrate either at last weekend's BBC contemporary composer festival at the Barbican.

For 20 years this small beacon of light has cheered the January gloom, filling a Friday to Sunday slot with concerts, talks, and other events profiling the work of some more or less modern figure. And it was a wonderful piece of immersion therapy that led at least two generations of listeners to some rapport with the likes of Henze, Lutoslawski, Berio et al.

Last weekend profiled Judith Weir, very effectively – but there will be no more. The Beeb has pulled the plug on one of its most beneficial services to music, feebly trying to disguise its action with talk about opportunities for new ideas and the sop of a couple of composer-focus days scattered throughout the year when the hard truth is that this is just one more retreat from the responsibilities the Beeb was set up to assume.

The January weekend was expensive and didn't put too many bums on seats (although a lot of people listened with devotion to the broadcasts), so the whole thing has been axed. No doubt the men in suits at BH thought it was elitist. That it was a thing of excellence and ideals wouldn't have impressed them.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS BY BIRCH

It's outrageous! I'm absolutely seething!
ARTISTS' FURY AT BRITISH COUNCIL CUTS
ANGRY LETTER TO THE GUARDIAN FROM HIRST, WHITEREAD, EMIN, CHAPMANS ETC.
"APPALLING."
No-one asked him to sign.

Letters

Gonged off

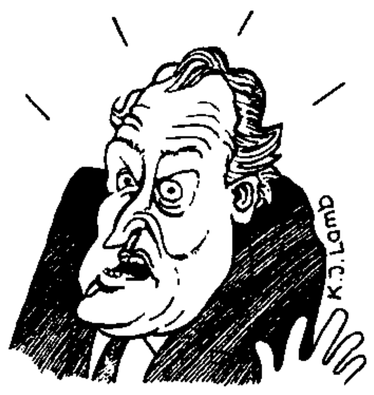
Sir,

It is just possible that Richard Handover did not get his gong for his work with WH Smug, Nationwide or Royal Mail ("Gordon's Gongs 2008", 1201). Perhaps it was because of his tireless work with the charity Kids Company, his being head of the Adult Learning Inspectorate, being Chairman of Governors at Dauntseys School, his charity work with... etc etc.

MATTHEW TESTER,

Via email.

Anagram



Sir,

PETER HAIN = Repent? I? Ha!

Yours,
TIM HOPKINS,
Luton, Beds.

Killing Joke

Sir,

I disagree profoundly with Len Pedroza (Letters, Eye 1201). There's nothing funny about suicide bombings, but I do think the best way of deterring potential suicide bombers is *to laugh at them. Would-be martyrs should know that, if the infidels remember them at all, it will be* not *as the terrifying and pitiless Sword of God, but as sad, underachieving twerps who threw their lives away for nothing. Perhaps then they might be just that bit less ready to actually go out and murder complete strangers in cold blood.*

Sincerely,
PAUL ALLEN,

Nootdorp, The Netherlands.

Putting the Bhutto in

Sir,

With reference to the Letter From Delhi (Eye 1201), it is not advocated by Islamic teaching that women change their name after marriage. This seems to be more of a Western practice.

S.I. HAIDER,

Via email.

Cost of nepotism

Sir,

Re Letter From Delhi (1201).

Your Correspondent rightly highlights the clear similarities in the nepotism that has always pervaded South Asian political leadership. However, Your Correspondent attempts to soften the Burmese situation somewhat; he does not state that – unlike the other sub-continental dynasties – General Aung San caused anarchy in his attempts to bring about Burmese independence and invited the Japanese Army into Burma thus causing the widespread killing of allied troops during the Burma Campaign. My late brother's closest friend was killed there, cut down whilst bravely and single-handedly trying to take on a Japanese machine-gun nest.

Aung San Suu Kyi has to live with this in her mind as she tries to achieve her rightful victory over the Generals.

Yours truly,
GRANVILLE BULL,

Huddersfield.

RSPCA to the rescue?

Sir,

Two RSPCA non-encounters that made me wonder.

1) A young squirrel gets stuck in a down pipe from a high gutter at my Victorian residence. We phone the RSPCA and are told that the misfortunes of wild animals are not within their remit. (We eventually freed it by a fluke).

2) We find in our car yard an abandoned large, collarless and very fierce Alsatian dog that has been sleeping under a seldom used car and raiding our dustbins for food. We call the RSPCA pointing out that we now have a problem with a domestic animal. "Is it injured?" they ask. "Well no," we reply, "but it needs help and is too dangerous for us to handle." "If it is not injured," say the RSPCA, "we cannot help you."

Eventually my incredulous American wife persuaded Putney police to send a visiting dog handling team to try and capture the Alsatian. It sprang over our gate and disappeared never to be seen again. (Later we were reprimanded for bothering the police.)

Is it not the answer that the RSPCA prefers prosecuting people to helping animals?

Yours,
JOHN FARMER,

London SW15.

Sir,

Private Eye in general, and Muckspreader in particular, can usually be relied upon rightly to expose waste of public money, dishonesty and corruption on the part of elected representatives in all kinds of organisations.

Animals who suffer at the hands of articulate human beings have no voice to describe or defend themselves against the cruelty, exploitation or neglect carelessly meted out to them. Successful RSPCA prosecutions, despite horrific evidence, are expensive and difficult to secure.

With reference to the 1201 report, it was particularly mean-spirited and uncharitable of Muckspreader to dish the dirt on the RSPCA and to patronise the "old ladies" (sic) who leave money to them. There was no impropriety, no dishonesty, no embezzlement, merely the motivation of those working for the charity, paid solely from voluntary donations, to see justice done.

People don't have to give money to the RSPCA. This charity receives no state aid and to ridicule and deter its supporters from giving to it was truly unworthy of you.

Muckspreader would do better to concentrate on the machinations of DEFRA, riddled with corruption, and rich on our taxes.

Yours faithfully,
JULIA ANDERSON,

Sowerby Bridge, W. Yorkshire.

Sir,

Thanks for exposing the RSPCA (1201). Let me pluck your heartstrings, you heartless bastards.

When my much loved, but very old, cat was too old to continue, I took it to the vet, teary eyed, to put it down. The locum vet decided I had mistreated it, and "reported me" to the RSPCA. I was subsequently phoned, verbally intimidated, and even doorstepped by RSPCA "Inspectors" pretending to have police powers. My daughter was "interviewed" under caution (illegally and deceptively) when I was away, although as she was not residing with me she knew nothing about it. All the time the RSPCA acted like a branch of the legal or police system, including uniforms, notebooks, language, and threats.

They aren't the police. They have seriously lost their way, forgotten their core constituency, and the RSPCA is now a disgrace.

Yours,
GEORGE EDWARDS,

Rawcliffe, East Riding.

Scenes You Seldom See

"I've just bought something I actually like"

Sir,

On the basis that a preponderance of your readership (given the Eye's prevailing ethos) will probably take a diametrically opposed point of view to Muck, the RSPCA could not find a better advocate.

As a result of his latest steaming heap (farmers and lawyers – what a noisome combination!) I will certainly consider a bequest to the RSPCA.

MALCOLM ROBINSON,

Wombwell.

• **Intermediate Bathroom & Latin**
Every Wednesday 8.30pm

Advertisement for Hove Dance Centre

Brand awareness

Sir,

Doh, you thickies! Thanks for putting me and my good friend Russell Brand in Pseuds Corner last issue, a great honour and that, but a) it was a book review, not an interview, b) you managed to mangle the quote anyway, and c) it was meant to be humorous.

A bit worrying Private Eye doesn't get jokes nowadays...

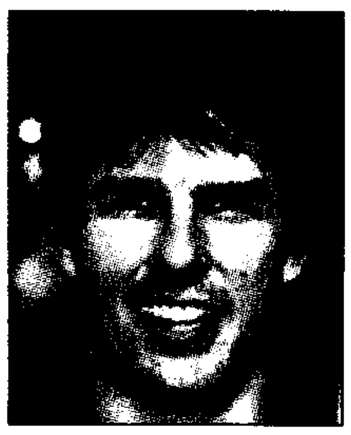
Pip pip!
CHRISTOPHER HART,

Via email.

PS. When I say "my good friend Russell Brand", that's a joke too. He's not really. In fact my book review was very rude about him.

Lookalikes

Cruise



Barrowman

Sir,

Has anybody noticed the similarity in appearance between John Barrowman and Tom Cruise? One is a member of a group that fights alien conspiracies from its Torchwood HQ – the other conspires to torch all opposition from its alien HQ. (One wonders if you'll publish this letter or are you afraid of getting the John Sweeney treatment?)

TONY SANDY,

Via email.

Ritual response

Sir,

This letter is to comment on "Satanic Panic: The Devil's in the detail".

I am a licensed psychologist in the United States. There is no basis to state that Dissociative Identity Disorder or ritual abuse are discredited in the United States, or that they are junk science or myths. Dissociative Identity Disorder is a completely valid diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV of the American Psychiatric Association, with extensive research substantiating it as a mental disorder. And I cannot fathom the reason that Private Eye would discount with a broad brush the existence of ritual abuse. Valerie Sinason is a fully-credentialed psychotherapist and psychoanalyst, and has stood up for victims of ritual crimes when others have been intimidated into silence. I commend the London Safeguarding Children Board for having Dr Sinason speak and for their work to safeguard ritual abuse victims and to provide appropriate psychotherapy services to dissociative children.

ELLEN LACTER, Ph.D., Psychologist, San Diego, California, USA.

Sir,

The issue I wish to correct is your comment that Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) has been discredited in the US. Both Psychiatric manuals (DSM IV and ICD10) that are used worldwide recognise DID (in DSM IV) and MPD (in ICD10) as a Psychiatric Disorder. Both DSM IV and ICD10 are compiled by eminent international psychiatrists . The acceptance of Dissociative Disorders (of which DID is one of five Dissociative Disorders) is increasing within NHS PCT's (Primary Care Trusts) in this country and is also recognised in the NICE guidelines.

Sincerely,
REMY AQUARONE,
Secretary ESTD (European Society for Trauma and Dissociation).

Daily male

Sir,

Re piece about Scottish Express and independence (Street of Shame, 1201). Certainly the Scottish DX [Daily Express] is a shadow of its former self, but at least do enough research to suss that Kerry Gill is a he and not a she. He normally has a picture byline. Shoddy.

Have a look at what Newsquest (Glasgow Herald and Evening Times) are doing if you want to report greater sins about the destruction of decent reporting in Scotland.

Otherwise keep up the good work.

IAIN McLELLAN,
Via email.

"You've really hit your stride now, Thag"

Lookalike

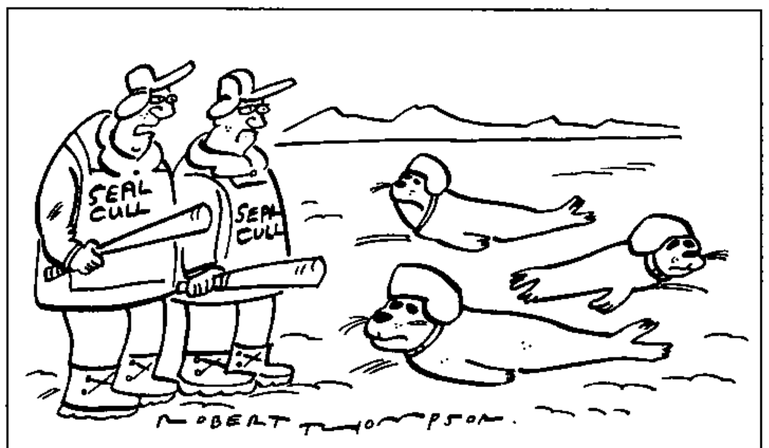
Littlejohn

Policeman

Sir,

I am appalled that the Daily Mail (16 January) should so disrespectfully describe the gallant officer who apprehended "glamour model" Alicia Douvall during an affray as a "fat, sweaty copper" in the mould of the Fast Show *characters. Of even greater concern is that the Mail is clearly paying columnist Richard Littlejohn so meagrely that he has to moonlight as a member of HM Constabulary in the first place.*

Yours,
STEVE ELLIS,
London E17.



"That's evolution for you..."

Engine trouble

Sir,

Interesting that you chose to illustrate a piece about Tata's Indian "people's car" (Eye 1201) with a Chinese model that also represents a fine line in corporate responsibility. The Chery QQ shown is to all intents and purposes a copy of a General Motors design (née Daewoo) and GM still smarts at having lost the court case it brought in Beijing for theft of intellectual property.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN BOLEY (ex-editor 'AutoAsia'),
Bangkok, Thailand.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"If you want a quiet life you turn a blind ear."

GEOFFREY BOYCOTT, Radio 5 Live
(Andrew Boulton)

"We flew in by air..."

KAREN ALLEN, BBC News
(Maurice Lees)

"Don't tell us your team talk, but tell us exactly what you will be saying to the lads before the game today."

BBC Radio Scotland
(patsyb)

"He wants to go back to France... and you can't get nearer to France than Plymouth."

PAUL WALKER, BBC Radio Sheffield
(Peter Cooper)

"A tremendous free kick! It probably would have gone in if he had put it where he intended to put it."

STAN COLLYMORE, Radio 5 Live
(Jon Naylor)

Pedants' Corner

... I write to correct, pedantically, my husband's attempted pro-Polish pedantry (Eye 1201). "Wienczyslaw" can be a forename as well as a surname. And there are two "z"s in "Krzysztof".

IWONA PRESLAND.

... Dr John Radford (Letters, 1201) is right that life imitates Yes, Minister, *but he misquoted Sir Humphrey. What the great man actually said (in the episode 'The Skeleton in the Cupboard') was "Obviously I'm not a trained lawyer, or I wouldn't have been in charge of the legal unit." Meanwhile, the Aristophanes cartoon was delightful, but you should know that there were no women on the stage in ancient Greece; their parts was played by men in padded costumes.*

RENE LAVANCHY (aka The Magistrate, Aristophanes' Lysistrata, 2004).

... The subject of economic blunders calls to mind not only one line but a whole episode ("A Conflict Of Interest") of Yes, Prime Minister. *When a bank is threatened with insolvency, an embattled PM – keen to avoid a financial scandal in advance of a party conference and a possible run on the pound – resorts to a Bank of England bail-out courtesy of the taxpayer.*

Readers unacquainted with the series will be relieved to know that things eventually worked out for Jim Hacker.

SEBASTIAN BOSLEY.

... In his discussion of whether the word "pedants" in "Pedants Corner" should take an apostrophe after the "s", my (near) namesake Glyn Austen makes a contribution of high quality – dense, arcane and supremely trivial – to the putative Corner, yet which is marred by a glaring blunder that should, arguably, deny him his place amongst the greatest exponents of the art of pedantry. His letter contains the phrase "... so if 'Pedants' was indeed an adjectival form ...". "If" takes the subjunctive. "Was" should be "were".

NIGEL AUSTIN.

... Strictly speaking, Glyn Austen (Letters 1201) is right. But English syntax has its own vagaries. We write "sports field" and "games room" and "languages lesson" and "classics courses" and "Beatles records" with never a possessive apostrophe in sight.

During WW2 the BBC ran the Home Service and the Forces Programme (later renamed the Light Programme). Again, no apostrophe was used, even though there were three armed forces whose programme this was.

However, the "Boys' Brigade" always spell themselves with an apostrophe, and this is surely identical in construction to "Speakers' Corner" or "Visitors' Book" or "Freshers' Ball" or "Strangers' Gallery" or indeed "Pseuds' Corner". But in all these cases the apostrophe is frequently omitted nowadays, just as in phrases like "three days pay" or "two months holiday".

Confusingly, there is often uncertainty about the position of the apostrophe – if any. For instance, "Stranger's Gallery", "Strangers' Gallery" and "Strangers Gallery" all appear in official websites.

So I hope the Eye follows the trend and isn't intimidated by prescriptive readers. Hurrah for the incipient death of the apostrophe, touted by Bernard Shaw but still to be attained.

BRIAN WHITE.

... If Pedants Corner stretches the full length of the page, it is a column, not a corner.

BEN STANLEY.

Letter from **Nairobi**

from Our Own Correspondent

AS the carefully nurtured illusion of political stability and national calm is blown to pieces, we Kenyans know only too well where things are heading – and who is to blame.

Mwai Kibaki, our decrepit but venal president, rigged last month's elections with a panicked clumsiness that would have embarrassed even our cousins in Zimbabwe and Nigeria. Raila Odinga, his chippy opponent, needed no excuse to call demonstrations that push us ever deeper into the abyss. But these dreary protagonists have not been short of help.

Stanley Murage, permanent secretary at State House, orchestrated the rigging from his place in the shadows. Sam Kivuitu, chairman of the electoral commission, looked first drunk as the scale of the corruption became clear – and then terrified as, flanked by paramilitary police, he endorsed our doctored results. With an unseemly haste that soiled his office as chief justice, Evans Gicheru swore in Kibaki for a second term. And now a shock team is engaged with efforts, quite literally, to crush the opposition.

In the vanguard is Martha Karua, the, ahem, justice minister. Famously abrasive and thin-skinned, she still bristles over a 2004 scandal when she was held up by armed robbers in the back of a car, in which she had been vigorously debating Uganda with a Catholic priest. Cheated their opponents may have been, but they are themselves by no means beyond scrutiny. Odinga's right-hand man, William Ruto, has a reputation as a bigot as violent as he is ruthless and corrupt. So where are our friends?

From Africa came John Kufour, a Ghanaian John Major but without the charisma. He left. The American ambassador, Michael E Ranneberger, first accepted the result. European colleagues said he looked like a fool, so he changed his mind. But Washington likes Kibaki. He allows unfettered spooking on the bearded brothers next door in Somalia. When Jendayi Frazer, assistant secretary of state for Africa, arrived to mediate, Ranneberger flipped again: both sides had been rigging. After that he found analysts from Florida (of all places) to say the real result had been too close to call. Sadly the International Republican Institute chose the same moment to conclude that the opposition had scored a clear victory.

Then there is the World Bank. Like other donors, it has a pile of money tied up in projects no one's reputation can afford to see scrutinized. Early on in the crisis, Colin Bruce, the bank's representative in Nairobi since 2005, declared in a confidential memo that Kibaki had won the presidential contest. He rubbished EU monitors' reports of rigging. Mr Bruce rents his home from the president and his charming wife Lucy, while the bank's offices are in a building owned by a crony and golfing buddy of Mr Kibaki.

Gordon Brown and David Miliband have made stern phone calls. There was a time when Britain would have seen this coming, if only because your companies were in the thick of our most dodgy deals. There are spies aplenty, but they look after Somalia. Kenya? Barely features – other than when comparing notes on the merits of a holiday in Malindi versus a weekend in Lamu. And the real diplomats have been further usurped by the absurd Department for International Development. The current high commissioner in Nairobi, Adam Woods, is a former DfID man. As old-fashioned political reporting all but dries up, DfID is spending more money in Kenya while understanding less and less about the political realities.

Miliband and Africa minister Mark Malloch Brown are wise to the malign influence of Dfid. But it has left Britain without an Africa policy and nothing but embarrassment in places like Nigeria, where there is nothing to show for a billion pounds spent. And here in Kenya, it's all too late.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "Although the Indian economy is booming," Bahadur Chand Gupta told journalists in Dwarka, alongside New Delhi's international airport, "99% of this country's population have never experienced air travel. Most Indians will never see the inside of an airplane, except in movies, and could never afford the cost of a real airline ticket. Before I retired, I was an engineer for Indian Airlines, and felt a thrill every time I boarded a plane, and I wanted others to experience that same excitement. So when this Airbus 300 was scrapped in 2003, I bought it, reassembled it, and began operating my own virtual airline.

"For a mere 150 rupees, passengers can climb up these genuine aircraft steps and enter the Air Gupta Airbus, where their boarding passes are checked by my wife, Nirmal, dressed as a stewardess. Once inside, they buckle up and watch a safety demonstration, and then I take the controls and commence 'take off,' although we don't actually move, because the plane only has one wing and no tail, and is

supported by concrete pillars. Once we are 'airborne,' Nirmal passes along the aisles with her drinks trolley, while I make announcements like 'we will soon be passing through a zone of turbulence, do not be disturbed,' or 'we are now cruising at 20,000 feet, sit back and enjoy snacks.' Each passenger is served with an airline meal, and can visit the cockpit, so by the time they leave, they know precisely what it's like to belong to the jet set. And best of all, because we don't actually fly, there are never any delays."

After their virtual flight, passengers queued up to express their delight. "It was much more beautiful than I ever imagined," said Jasmine, a teacher, while tyre mechanic Selim added "I see planes passing all day long over my roof. I just had to try out the experience for myself." *(ANI, 3/10/07 and New Delhi Travel Guide 2007. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*

– ● –

● *Dr Ismael & Mama Muna. Consultation Fee: R30. From the Spiritual Mountain Kum!*

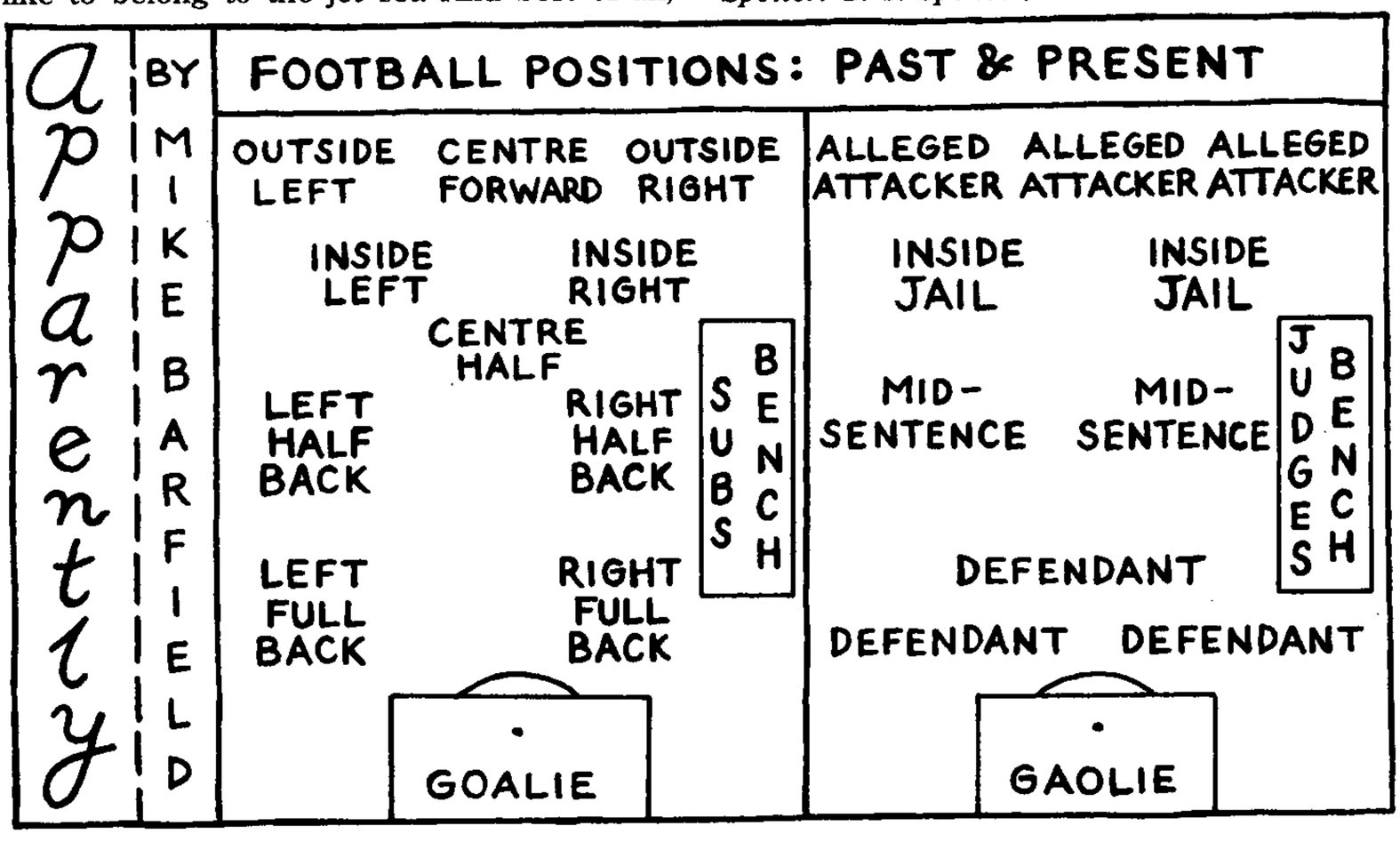
Remove bad luck, Get jobs and Customer attraction, Sexual problems, End jealousness Both at home and work, Court & divorce cases, Bring back lost lover, Protection of property, HIV/AIDS symptoms, Love affairs, Diabetes/ Piles/Asthma/Acne/TB, Pressure both high & low, Bewitched body pains, vile neighbours, Long/no periods for women, Be liked at work, Lack of strength in the body, Gonorrhea, Women who can't produce, Vomiting all the time, Weak in sex, Diarrhoea. Dry hair.

Find him C.T.D. Building, 3rd flr, room 3. You can pay after job done." (The Citizen [Johannesburg], 10/9/07. Spotter: Nichol)

– ● –

● "Chessboxing is the ultimate challenge for both body and mind," said Michiel Groeneveld in a press release from the World ChessBoxing Organisation, "and to become a champion, you have to be very good in both disciplines. Chessboxers go through alternating four-minute rounds of chess and three-minute rounds of boxing, with a one-minute break inbetween, and a maximum of eleven rounds are fought. A knockout or a checkmate can lead to an early win, but if the chess ends in a draw, then it's settled with the points earned in the boxing rounds.

"The first-ever official chessboxing fight was held in Amsterdam in November 2003, and since then the sport has grown rapidly. According to our estimates, there are 150,000 potential chessboxers around the globe, especially in Russia and the Ukraine, and our ultimate hope is that chessboxing will one day become the supreme discipline at the Olympic Games. Our motto is 'fighting is done in the ring and wars are waged on the board,' because we know that the truly vicious conflict takes place in chess, whereas the boxing is governed by rules of fairness. And to ensure that very powerful but stupid boxers who know nothing about chess cannot just batter their opponent into unconsciousness during the first boxing round, all competitors have to reach a minimum standard of chess before they can take part." *(Delhi Times, 17/11/07 and WCBO website. Spotter: G. T. Spencer)*



A SPECIAL NEW YEAR DIRECTIVE (NO. 13)

From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

Comrades,

We are in danger of being diverted from the serious purpose of the Age of Change by a flood of idle and mendacious rumour-mongering being peddled by the Murdochite-Rothermerist press concerning a highly respected and unimportant member of my Politburo at the time of writing, Comrade Hain.

In order to clarify this trivial matter, I reprint below the full text of Comrade Hain's voluntary recantation and apology for what he admits was no more than a crime of Incompetence-ism.

A Statement From Comrade Hain, written in his own hand at 3.30am, January 16 2008

To The Supreme Leader and the People of Britain

It is with the utmost sense of shame that I hereby admit that I have done nothing wrong. For which I would like to apologise in full.

Such is my devotion to the Supreme Leader and to our glorious Party, that I spent too many hours single-mindedly working to build the Age of Change and overlooked minor technicalities relating to my private finances.

This involved only very small sums of money, some as little as £100,000, which were given to me by loyal supporters of the Party to assist in the vital work of my think-tank, the Institute of Organisational Unification (IOU).

The sole purpose of the IOU was to facilitate my wish to be chosen as Deputy Leader to the greatest and most inspirational Supreme Leader our country and our Party have ever known.

Surely it would be wrong to punish any individual who was acting from such a worthy motive?

Surely there should be no limit to the resources which should be made available to those committed and patriotic Party members who are prepared to devote their lives to such a noble end?

I feel entirely confident that our Great Helmsman will not make the grievous error of caving in to the howling jackals of the Cameronite-Osbornist reactionary claque and their allies among the corrupt Bow Street running dogs of the so-called police force.

I would like to thank the Supreme Leader in advance for his complete support in this matter, which I am sure will be readily forthcoming now that I have issued this apology for the unfortunate mistakes I did not make.

Signed,
COMRADE P. HAIN,
Commissar for the Work and Pensions Directorate

Comrades will no doubt scrutinise Comrade Hain's recantation with considerable care, and will form their own conclusions – while bearing in mind that no one is indispensable. As it says in the *The Little Brown Book*, "In the Age of Change, one can always change one's mind" (taken from Chapter 57, entitled "Dither-ism As A Positive Tool In The Decision-Making Process").

Yours, Gordon Brown

THE NEED FOR PERSONAL SACRIFICE

Comrades,

It is incumbent on every one of us to tighten our belts as the ship of state steers through choppy waters as it seeks to avoid a certain rock of Northern variety!

(This humorous aside was supplied by the Jocularity Delivery Unit as part of its ongoing mission to highlight the human side of the great Leader's many-faceted personality. It is Spontaneous Joke No. 1543, from the section headed "Light-hearted Maritime Metaphors – Nautical But Nice!!!")

At this time of increasing financial exigency, caused by the profligate and reckless agents of Wall Street-Imperialist-Sub-Prime-ism, I have decided to set an example by foregoing part of my allotted pension increase.

Compare this personal sacrifice with the conduct of the discredited former leader, who only this week has greedily sold himself to the same Wall Street hyenas who have plunged the world economy into chaos, thus threatening to undermine all that I managed to achieve in the ten years when my policies of anti-Blairite Prudence-ism built up the strongest economy the world has ever known.

All Comrades must have felt sick with shame at the sight of this unprincipled, grasping little Gollum jumping aboard the capitalist bandwagon, leaving a trail of slime in his wake.

And now the same vain traitor to the People of Britain, his pockets bulging with ill-gotten Busho-adventurist gold, imagines that he will soon be made Supreme President of the Federation of Greater Europe!

This would mean that the former leader would be in a position to tell me what to do and how to run my own country! Can you imagine me allowing such a thing!

G. Brown, Supreme Leader.

A Message From Comrade Ed Balls, Commissar for Lifelong Knowledge in the Community, Pre-School Diplomas and Inter-personal Civic Skills

The children of the proletariat have been excluded for too long from those bastions of elitist privilege; the wrongly-called "public schools". Let these hotbeds of reactionary feudalism realise that their days are numbered, and that our patience with them is at an end.

What, I ask, have these hothouses of academic hierarchism ever produced for this country but the effete Cameronite-Osbornist-Bullingdonians who sit around every Wednesday sneering at the Supreme Leader and making him look an idiot with their puerile jibes, and their vile insinuations that our country's public education system is a complete disaster.

From the desk of **Comrade E. Balls**
(educated at the hated, elitist, reactionary, fee-paying Nottingham High School)

HERO OF THE BRITISH UNION

The Supreme Leader explains to Comrade Beckham that unlike his predecessor, the disgraced former leader Comrade Blair, he does not get himself photographed with celebrities and famous sportsmen merely in the hope of gaining popularity.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE GREAT LEADER'S SUMMIT WITH THE CHINESE PREMIER, IN WHICH HE BRAVELY CONFRONTS THE ERRORS IN THE CHINESE POLITICAL SYSTEM

Comrade Brown: In your country the leader isn't democratically elected.

Premier Wen: Just like yours.

Comrade Brown: I mean, in your country people don't get to vote about important issues.

Premier Wen: Like Europe.

Comrade Brown: Er... time for me to go to India.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE GREAT LEADER'S SUMMIT WITH THE INDIAN PRIME MINISTER, IN WHICH HE BRAVELY CONFRONTS THE EVILS OF POVERTY

Comrade Brown: Can we talk about aid, Prime Minister?

Prime Minister Singh: Alright, how much would you like?

Comrade Brown: Er... time to go home.

BLAIR RECEIVED INTO BANK WITH SIMPLE CEREMONY

by Our Religious Affairs Correspondent **Phil Wallet**

TONY BLAIR was today formally received into the J.P. Morgan Bank in New York.

In a simple but moving ceremony, the former prime minister was blessed by the bank's chairman Mr J.P. Mammonburger III, attended by members of the board robed in their traditional dark suits and sober ties.

Said Mr Blair afterwards, "For me this is the fulfilment of a lifelong journey. I have always believed in money, but obviously so long as I was prime minister I couldn't admit this publicly, even though my wife Cherie was known to be a devout cashaholic."

Nicene Greed

"In Britain," Mr Blair went on, "people become embarrassed if you talk too openly about believing in money."

"As my friend Mr Campbell used to say, 'we don't do money'."

"But, now I'm no longer in office, I can speak openly about what it means to me – which is everything!"

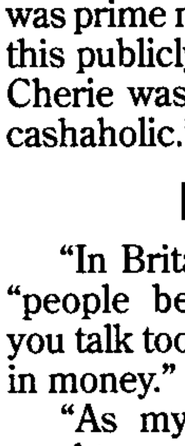
"I will admit," he confessed,

"that there have been many dark times when the only thing that sustained me was my faith in money and the belief that one day I would have lots of it."

Wages of Spin

A spokesman for the bank said that they were delighted to welcome, "this new worshipper into the fold."

"People come to us through many different paths, but they are all united in the one true faith – and today we were all thrilled to see Tony being given his first cheque for $2 million, as a sign that he had been received into full communion with the great brotherhood of rich people throughout the world."



NEWS AT TEN

SFX: Bong!

Sir Trevor McDonald: News at Ten is back.

SFX: Bong!

Fruity woman: Fruity woman brought in to look fruity.

SFX: Bong!

Sir Trevor: Sir Trevor McDonald tumbles... sorry stumbles... over his words...

SFX: Bong!

Fruity woman: Viewers turn over back to BBC News.

SFX: Bong!

Sir Trevor: And finally... News at Ten to be axed and replaced by terrible old Bond film.

SFX: Bond!

Blofeld *(for it is he)*: Ah, Mr Bong, I've been expecting you *(continues until "Carling Cup Highlights at 12.10am)*

NEW IN THE EYE

ME AND MY PANTS

THIS WEEK

JEREMY PAXMAN

Are pants important to you?

That's a bloody stupid question.

Do you have a favourite pair of pants?

Oh come off it...

Boxers or y-fronts?

None of your bloody business.

Do you think Marks and Spencer's underwear is... *pants?*

Look, let's get this absolutely right: it was a personal e-mail about a purely private matter, OK?

So how did it... *get out?*

Are you trying to be funny?

No, I'm being... *supportive.*

Right. I've had enough of this. (At this point Mr Paxman ripped off his microphone and stormed out. As a result, we were unable to ask the traditional question, "Has anything amusing ever happened to you in relation to your pants?")

NEXT WEEK: *Sir Herbert Gusset "Me And My Gusset".*

the PREMIERSH*TS

SPORTS T.V.
I TELL YOU INTERVIEWING SOME OF THESE MANAGERS CAN BE A RIGHT PAIN WHEN THEY DON'T GRASP THE VERY BASICS OF ENGLISH...
"DEFENCE"?
HOW DO YOU SPELL IT AGAIN?
NEWCASTL UTD FOOTBALL CLU
DICTIONARY
KK

IN THE COURTS

Man 'Never Knew Diana' – Shock Scenes At Royal Inquest

BY OUR COURT STAFF PHIL PAGES

Day 94: *Fayed v. Regina (et Dux Edinburgium, M.I.vi et cetera)*

GIVING evidence today in the inquest into the death of the late Diana, Princess of Wales, a new witness, Mr Keith Wasp, a 46-year-old builder and decorator from Barrow-in-Furness, told the court that he had never met the late Princess but had plenty of opinions on her which he would like to offer to the court.

Mr Justice Scottlecarrot: Mr Wasp, we are deeply indebted to you for coming all this way to give us your thoughts on the late Princess, however irrelevant they may be.

Wasp: Thank you, Your Worship.

Mr Michael Hugefee QC *(for Mr al-Fugger)*: Mr Wasp, I put it to you that you never had any contact with the late Princess of Wales.

Wasp: True, but I was very fond of her and considered her a close personal friend. You don't have to meet someone to know what they are like and what they are thinking.

Hugefee: From your knowledge of the late Princess, Mr Wasp, would you say that it was almost certain that she was murdered by Prince Philip?

Wasp: No, he wouldn't do that. He's not that type of man. And, anyway, I know for a fact that she wasn't pregnant.

Hugefee: That is an appalling allegation, Mr Wasp. How dare you undermine my client's case in this way? What evidence do you have for these far-fetched assertions?

Mr Wasp: I've got this book at home where it's all written out in black and white.

Mr Justice Scottlecarrot: Mr Wasp, am I to understand that you have come to the court without the vital evidence of which you speak? I must order you to go hotfoot back to Barrow-in-Furness forthwith, and to return as soon as possible with this key document, upon which the whole outcome of this case may hang. Meanwhile, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, this might be a suitable moment to adjourn. You are therefore free to spend the rest of the day visiting what my wife assures me is an excellent exhibition at the O_2 Arena (better known to some of you perhaps as the Millennium Dome) displaying relics of the late King, Tutankhamun.

Al-Fugger: Fuggin' Egyptian poofter!

(The court duly adjourned)

DAY 95: When the hearing resumed today, Mr Wasp apologised for being a few hours late, due to his Virgin 125 InterCity Sizzler having been delayed by flooding in the vicinity of Ashton-under-Water.

Mr Justice Scottlecarrot: Have you brought this very important and crucial book, Mr Wasp?

Mr Wasp: I have indeed, Your Holiness. *(At this point the witness produced a copy of* Secrets of the Royal Butler *by Paul Burrell.)* I have underlined all the important bits in red, Your Worship, to make it easier to follow the amazing secret evidence which the book contains.

Mr Justice Scottlecarrot: I am indebted to you, Mr Wasp. I see that your arduous round-trip to Barrow-in-Furness has not been in vain.

Mr Wasp: No, it was in a train!

Mr Justice Scottlecarrot: I must ask you to remain silent, Mr Wasp. This inquiry is not a joke. *(Laughter from all the assembled barristers and solicitors)* I see here on page 363 that the Queen told Princess Diana that she was planning to abdicate in favour of a Mr Elvis Presley, who had been sighted only that morning talking to a Martian gentleman at the 10 Items Or Less checkout counter at Tesco's. It appears from page 374 that Mr Presley and the afore-mentioned interplanetary visitor were planning to kill both Princess Diana and Mrs Parker-Bowles in order that Prince Charles could seize the throne and marry Miss Twiggy Legover, the well-known '60s model and Royal Nanny.

Hugefee: I must object, Your Honour, in the strongest possible terms. This is pure fantasy. You will be telling us next that Diana was murdered by the Duke of Edinburgh... Oh, I'm sorry – that is our case.

Al-Fugger: You fuggin' idiot!

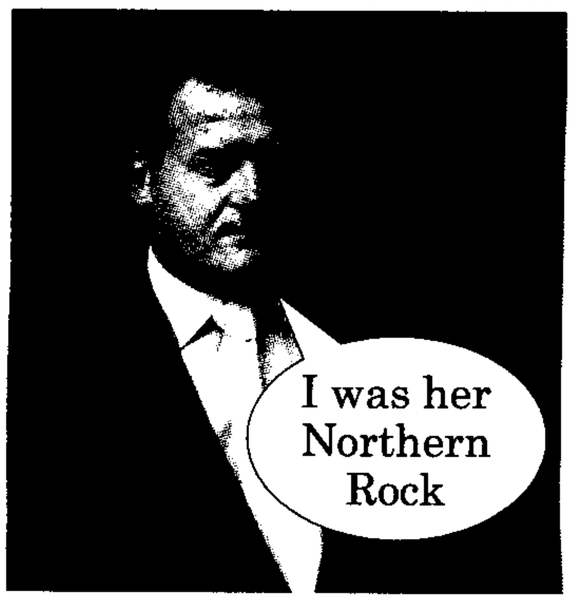
Hugefee: I do apologise. I seem to have got the wrong bundle.

Al-Fugger: That's the last bundle of fuggin' notes that I'm fuggin' giving you.

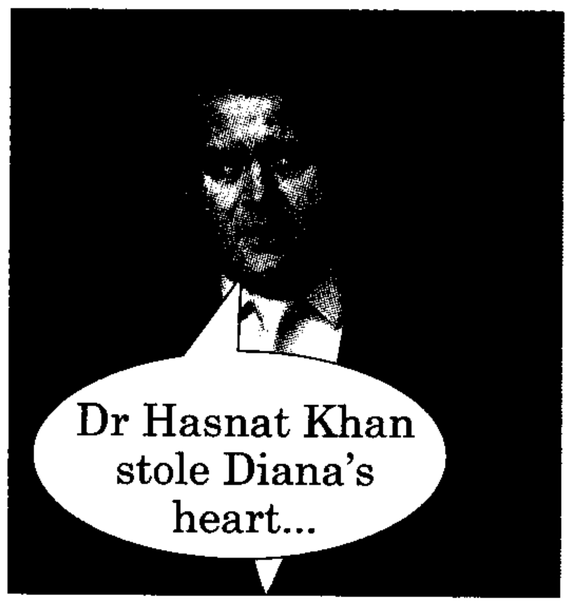
Mr Justice Scottlecarrot: Order, order! Perhaps this would be a good moment for the gentlemen of the press to write down all the rubbish they have just heard and put it on the front pages of tomorrow's newspapers.

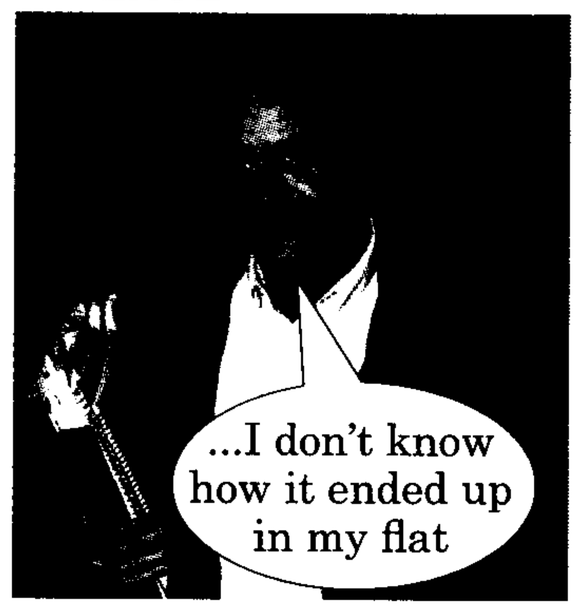
(Court emptied as hacks rushed to file nonsensical pieces, while lawyers queued up at nearest champagne bar to celebrate the approach of the inquest's 100th futile day)

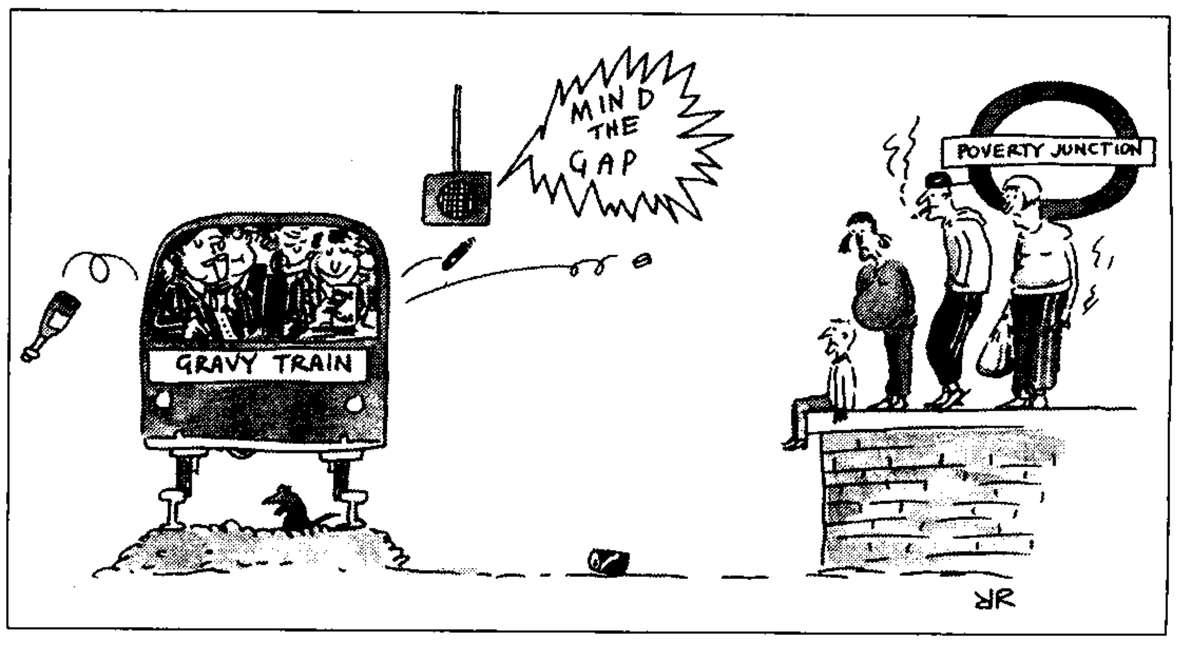
BURRELL TELLS TRUTH



BURRELL EVIDENCE





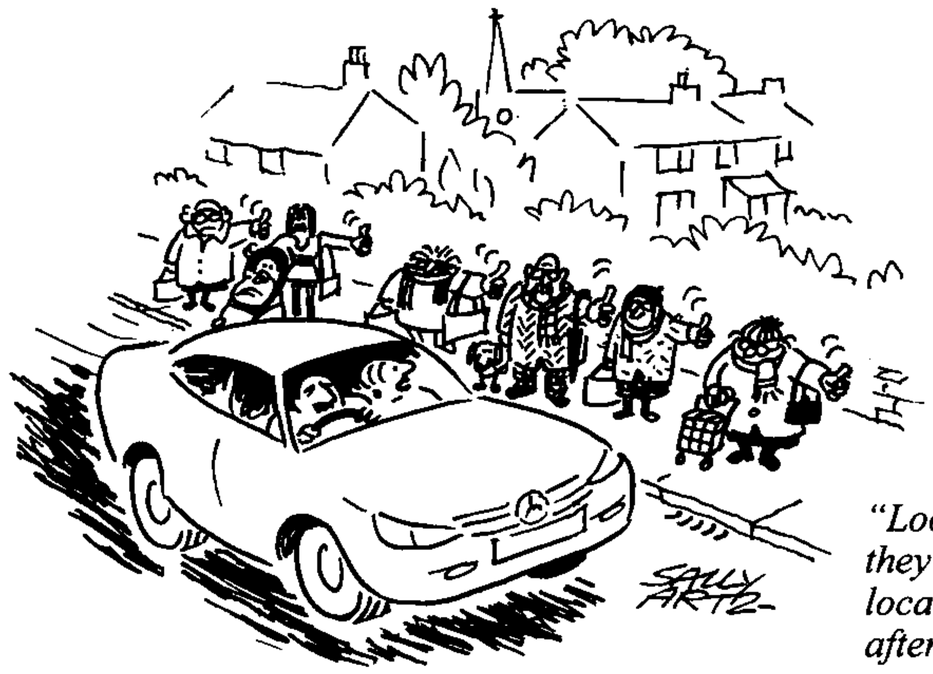


'DON'T WORRY IF YOU HAVEN'T FILLED IN ANY OF THE FORMS'

says Government

NUMBER 10 today confirmed that millions of self-assessment taxpayers will be excused from the January 31st tax deadline provided they have a valid excuse, such as that they are too busy with their day-to-day life to fill it in.

"This major new initiative, spearheaded by the Works and Pensions Minister Peter Hain, will be welcomed by all taxpayers who have inexplicably 'taken their eye off the ball'," said a Number 10 spokesman. "We realise that many members of the public are not very good at administration and find money a bit of a mystery, but their incompetence is no reason to punish them." He continued, "We support the public and believe that they are honest and *(cont. p. 94)*



"Looks as if they closed the local Post Office after all, then"

FRIENDS FEAR FOR TRAGIC BRITPRESS

by Our Showbiz Staff **Z List**

CLOSE FRIENDS of the troubled Britpress are worried that this time the famous American celebrity addict may be out of control.

"Britpress needs help," said one friend, "or the result will not just be a loss of dignity and self respect – it may be that Britpress will have its readers taken away."

Britpress' capacity for self-harm has worried observers for years, but never before have they been so concerned about a possibly fatal outcome to the story.

Said expert, Professor Roy Greenback, "Once popular and talented Britpress is now a sad and seedy shadow of its former self and *(cont. p. 94)*

On other pages

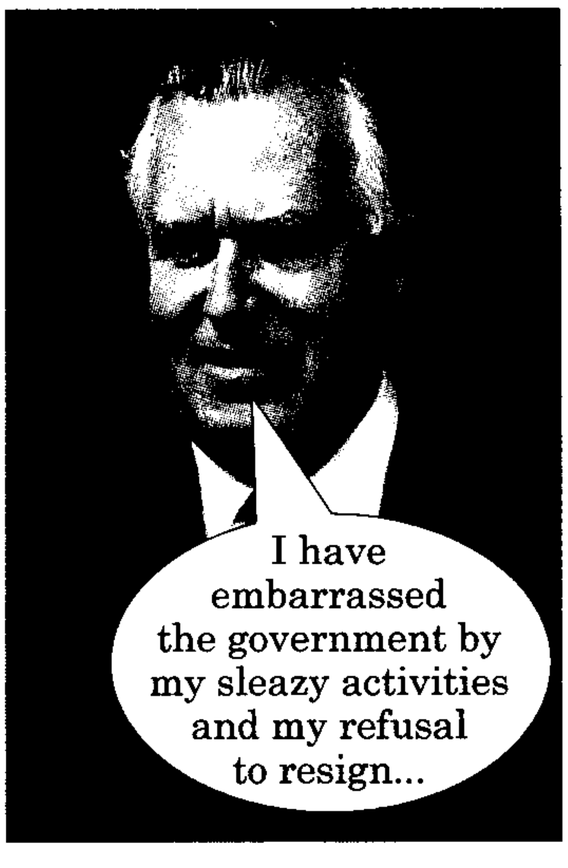
● Murder ● Sex ● Stories about the telly ● Er... ● That's it

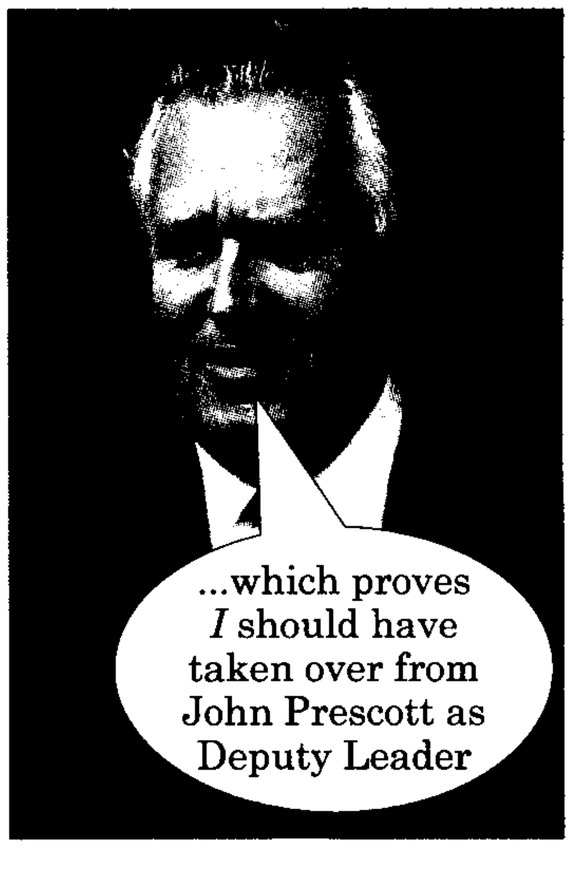
A Doctor Writes

MORE and more people these days suffer from 'incompetence'. What happens is that, as they go about their business as Cabinet ministers, they are taken short – of money. That means that they have to rush to the nearest dodgy think tank to obtain relief.

If you're worried about incompetence, or *Hain's Syndrome* as it is known to us doctors, do not worry. You are in very good company. It is now such a common complaint that there is scarcely anyone in public life who is not affected by it. And yet they are all able to carry on in their jobs regardless.

© A Spin Doctor, 2008.





THE BROON-ITES
THE PRIME MINISTER PRONE TO PRATFALLS!
Fountain and Jamieson
DO YE NO KEN THAT YE'RE GETTIN' A TAD ACCIDENT PRONE, GORDON?
HOW SO, MILIBROON ONE?
HENRY DAVIES
THA' FLOODS, TORNADOES, BIRD FLU, THA' LOST DISCS, NORTHERN ROCK, THA' ECONOMY...
STRICTLY COME HAGGIS HUNTING
KEBABS
MOD LAPTOP
HAULD YER WHEESHT, YOUNG MILIBROON! CO-INCIDENCE, THAT'S ALL! AH'M NOT THE FOCUS OF ALL DISASTERS - WHY, LOOK AT YON SCUNNER HAIN!
HE'S THA' ACCIDENT PRONE ONE!
JINGS, DONATIONS AND HELP MA BOAB!

"This 'presumed consent' has been a great success!"

CANNABIS – NEW DANGERS

by Our Drugs Staff
Francis Weed

A NEW report yesterday spelt out the dangers of cannabis for unwary governments. The report demonstrated that there were considerable side effects to downgrading the drug.

Said a spokesman, "Cannabis is a mind-altering drug and Ministers keep changing their mind about it. One day they think it's highly dangerous. The next they think it's completely safe."

He continued, "There are clear signs that using cannabis as a political stimulant can lead to addiction to drug legislation."

Bottom of the Class C

The spokesman concluded, "Ministers end up very depressed and paranoid, thinking everyone is out to get them because of their indecision.

"Which of course they are."

However, Health Minister Alan Johnson denied that his cannabis policy had any adverse effects."Hey, chill out, man! I mean, like, you're really getting heavy on me. It's just not fair."

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH | FRIDAY, JANUARY 25, 2008

Letters *to the Editor*

Mobile Commercials

SIR – I read with horror the report that London taxi-drivers are to be employed to recommend to their passengers various goods and services.

It is quite bad enough to have to listen to the respective merits of Mr Livingstone and Mr Johnson, or the likelihood of Chelsea United winning the Premiership (whatever that might be), without being told that one should spend one's holidays in Thailand or some other such ghastly place full of taxi-drivers

I can see the time coming when, to avoid this insidious subliminal advertising, I shall be forced to resort to climbing aboard one of these so-called 'Bendy Buses', courtesy of Mr Livingstone, or in the future possibly Mr Johnson.

Both of these gentlemen have their merits as mayoral candidates, as indeed they both have their defects. But in my humble opinion the congestion charge has done little to alleviate the problems of London's traffic and, while I'm on the subject, may I point out that Chelsea are a shoo-in for silver, thanks to the shrewd tactics of Mr Avram Grant.

The Very Rev. Yehudi Gusset
The Holiday Inn, Bangkok.

The New Compulsory Government Donor Card

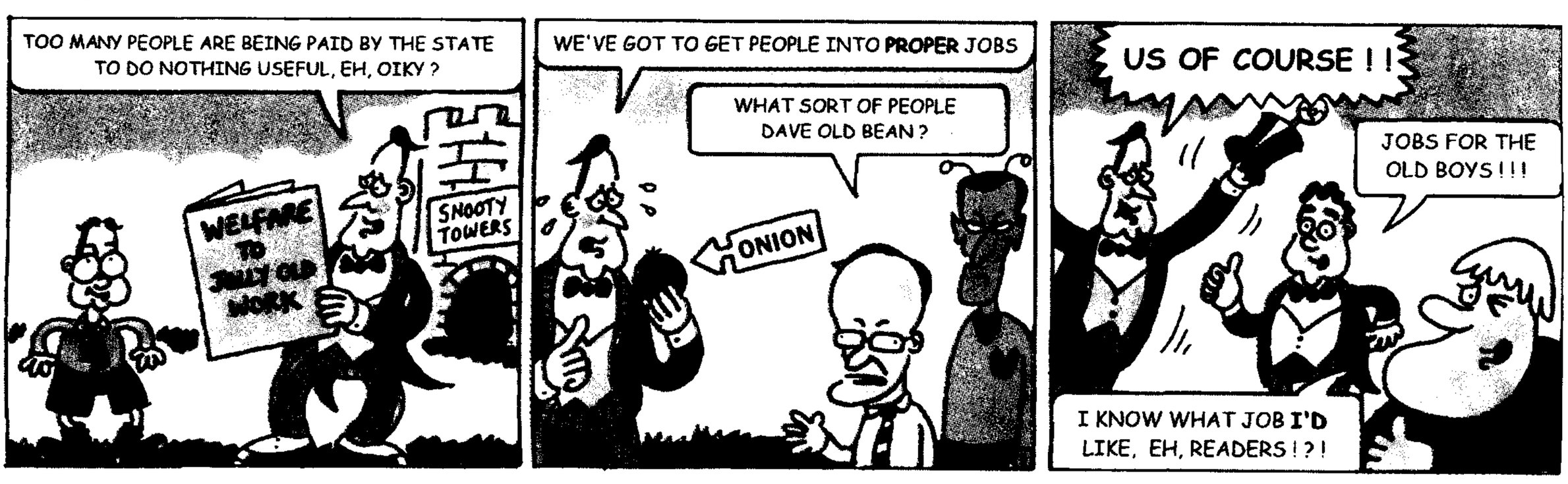
DONOR CARD

I hereby agree in the event of my death that all my money shall be extracted from my bank account and donated to the Labour Party in order to save its life.

Signed

Home Office announcement
Carry this card with you at all times. Failure to do so will result in your arrest and a fine equivalent to all your money.

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS


TOO MANY PEOPLE ARE BEING PAID BY THE STATE TO DO NOTHING USEFUL, EH, OIKY ?
WELFARE TO JOLLY OLD WORK
SNOOTY TOWERS
WE'VE GOT TO GET PEOPLE INTO PROPER JOBS
WHAT SORT OF PEOPLE DAVE OLD BEAN ?
ONION
US OF COURSE ! !
JOBS FOR THE OLD BOYS ! ! !
I KNOW WHAT JOB I'D LIKE, EH, READERS ! ? !

POLICE LOG

Neasden Central Police Station

Office hours: 9-12 Mon-Tues (except Tuesday)

0937 hrs Armed Response Unit sent to Neasden Market after Trading Standards Officer Tim Grott reported a fruit and vegetable merchant using the outlawed Imperial unit "pounds" in a commercial transaction. The trader, Ms Prunehat, resisted arrest, even after admitting that she had used the phrase "That'll be two pounds thirty-five" as she handed over the assorted comestibles. She was subdued by Taser and charged under EU Directive 373A(ii) Section 42.

1053 hrs Ansaphone message received from Neasden Magistrates Court alerting officers to the release on bail of a gang of five youths charged with murder. The youths were granted bail on condition that they didn't murder the same person again. They all promised the court that they would abide by this restriction. Recorded reply assures "Your call is important to us."

1104 hrs Ansaphone message received from member of public claiming that five youths now drunk and heading for Herbert Morrison Estate. Recorded reply informs "Your call is still important to us" and directs caller to the Support The Police Pay Rise website at www.knackercash.co.uk.

No further entries were recorded in the log due to redeployment of all officers in preparing paperwork for important case, *Regina et EU vs Prunehat.* Ms Prunehat, for the record, has been refused bail.

RED NEWT THREATENED – SCIENTISTS WARN

by Our Environment Staff **Breakfast Time O'Booze**

THE rare Red Newt (*Salamander glenfiddichus*) may soon be extinct, scientists warned last night.

The newt likes to swim in a sea of whisky, but in the modern world it is becoming increasingly difficult for the newt to get away with this.

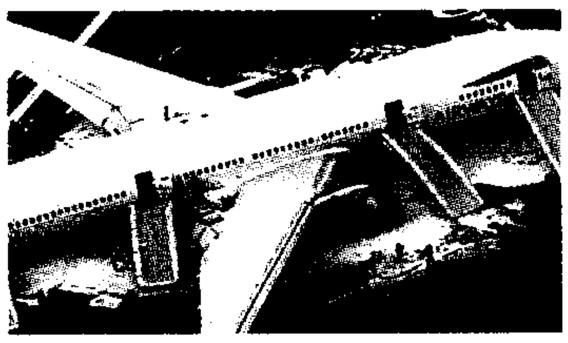
Newt watchers are desperately concerned that the last remaining Red Newt, currently to be found in the corridors of City Hall, may disappear completely under a tide of sleaze.

But some conservationists believe it is too late to save the Red Newt, saying that he should be left to die and then placed in the Natural Pissedory Museum in Red Kensington.

Late News

PANTO TO CLOSE – the popular London pantomime 'Drink Whittington' is to end its long run shortly. The story of the lovable Drink Whittington who hears the call of the Bells Whisky (Drink Again... Drink Again) and goes to London to seek fame and fortune is familiar to all of us. But of course Drink finds the street paved with pigeons *(surely 'gold which he gives to his cronies'? Ed)* and eventually becomes Mayor and is then thrown out by King Loverat (Boris). The pantomime is widely considered to be good family fun and worth every penny *(Oh no it isn't! Ed.)*

TIMETABLE OF DISASTER



FLIGHT BA 038

11.52 News of plane crash lands on newsdesk

11.53 Editor takes control and shouts: "Hold front page!"

11.57 Hacks realise no-one died and plane hasn't exploded in fireball as hoped

12.04 Emergency graphic team dispatched to save paper with huge illustration: "What might have happened"

12.06 Hacks file pieces beginning, "I was 20 seconds away from a really good story"

12.09 Subs heroically come up with puns on pilot's name, Coward

12.11 Disaster averted and editor puts newspaper on autopilot as hacks go and drown their sorrow in pub. "Hacks to manual – Don't bother with any cross-check".

Let's Parlez Franglais!

avec Kilometres Kington

Numero 94

Le Top Level Statesmanship – Blair et Sarko

Monsieur Blair *(pour c'est lui)*: Bonjour Sarko – vous êtes le 'Roi de Legover', n'est-ce pas?

Monsieur Sarkozy: Bien sur – vraiment cinq fois dans la nuit – just comme vous et Cherie. J'ai read it dans le Soleil de Monsieur Murdoch.

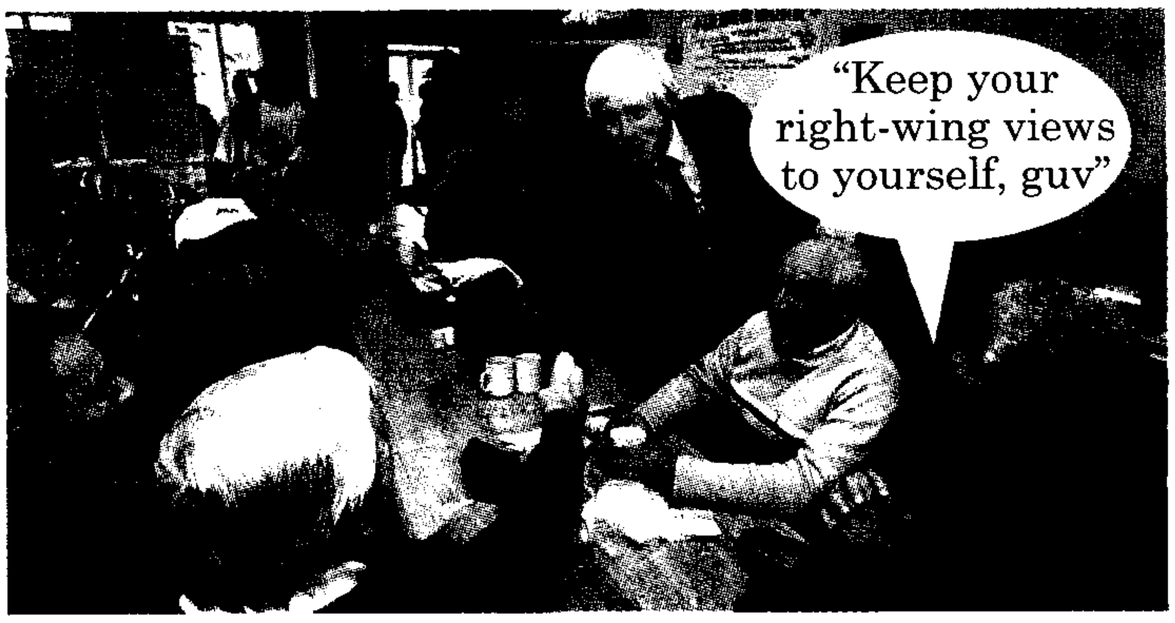
Blair: Oui, oui, mais vous êtes too kind – votre Mademoiselle Bruni est un vrai scorcher! Ooh la la! Phwoar! Est-ce que c'est chaud in here – or est-ce que c'est moi!

Sarko: Quand vous êtes President d'Europe vous pouvez ditcher votre wife et run off avec la totty formidable tout comme moi! Marquez mes words, mon brave! C'est le futur! Sexy Sarko et Testeroni Tony! Le Ticket de Rêve!

Blair: C'est un deal!! Comptez-moi in!!

© Kilometres Kington

BORIS MEETS CABBIES



Advertisement

NEW SERIOUS BORIS!

The Conservative Party are pleased to announce the launch of their new product – the improved formula Boris.

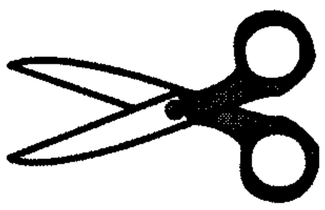
★ *Guaranteed free from gaffes, jokes and cripes-ism!*

No longer available in the Telegraph!

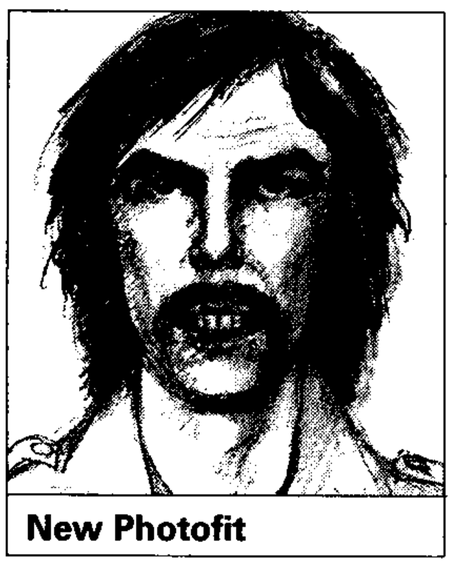
HOW TO CUT THROUGH RED TAPE

Those government guidelines in full

1. Pick up scissors.
2. Refer to Health and Safety Guidelines for the use of scissors, with particular reference to section 13(b) *Holding Scissors At The Correct End To Prevent Accidental Personal Harm*.
3. Go on two week Government Approved Training Course to learn correct *Scissor Procedure In The Workplace* and obtain Certificate of Scissor Handling Practice (Level 2).
4. Fill in insurance documentation including photocopy of certificate in order to ensure full cover in the event of scissor-related injury and/or cost of legal claims on behalf of Red Tape industry against scissor operatives.
5. Put down scissors.
6. Give up.



Exclusive To The Daily Express



New Photofit

DID GEORGE HARRISON TAKE MADDIE?

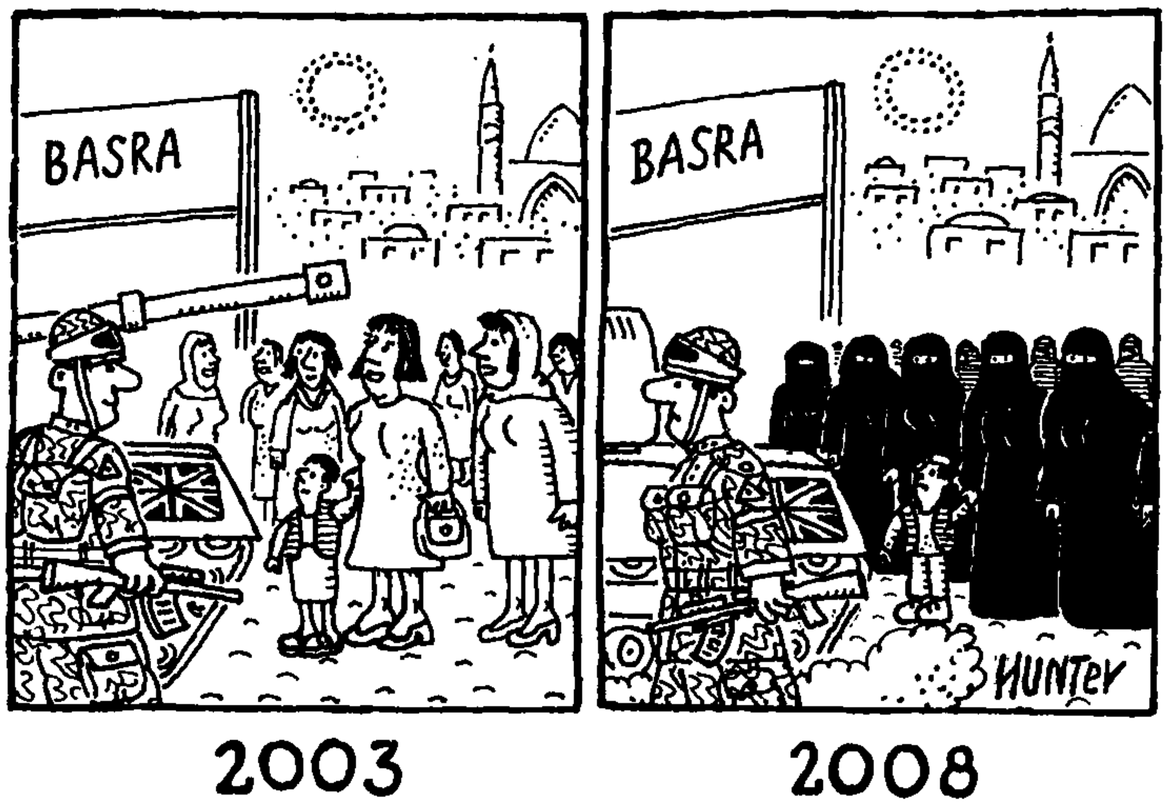
NO, of course not, but we'll print anything... no matter how pathetic.

EXCLUSIVE TO ALL PAPERS

DISGUST AT MADDIE LOOKALIKES

THERE was revulsion expressed yesterday after it was revealed that all British tabloids were running Madeleine McCann lookalike articles on their front pages.

"At first glance these lookalike Maddie articles fool you into thinking they are genuine news," said one salivating reader, "but if you get past the sensational headline you quickly see that these lookalike articles are nothing more than the same rehashed empty speculation."



2003 2008

THE DAILY MYTH

Friday, 25 January 2008

FLOODS HIT ATLANTIS

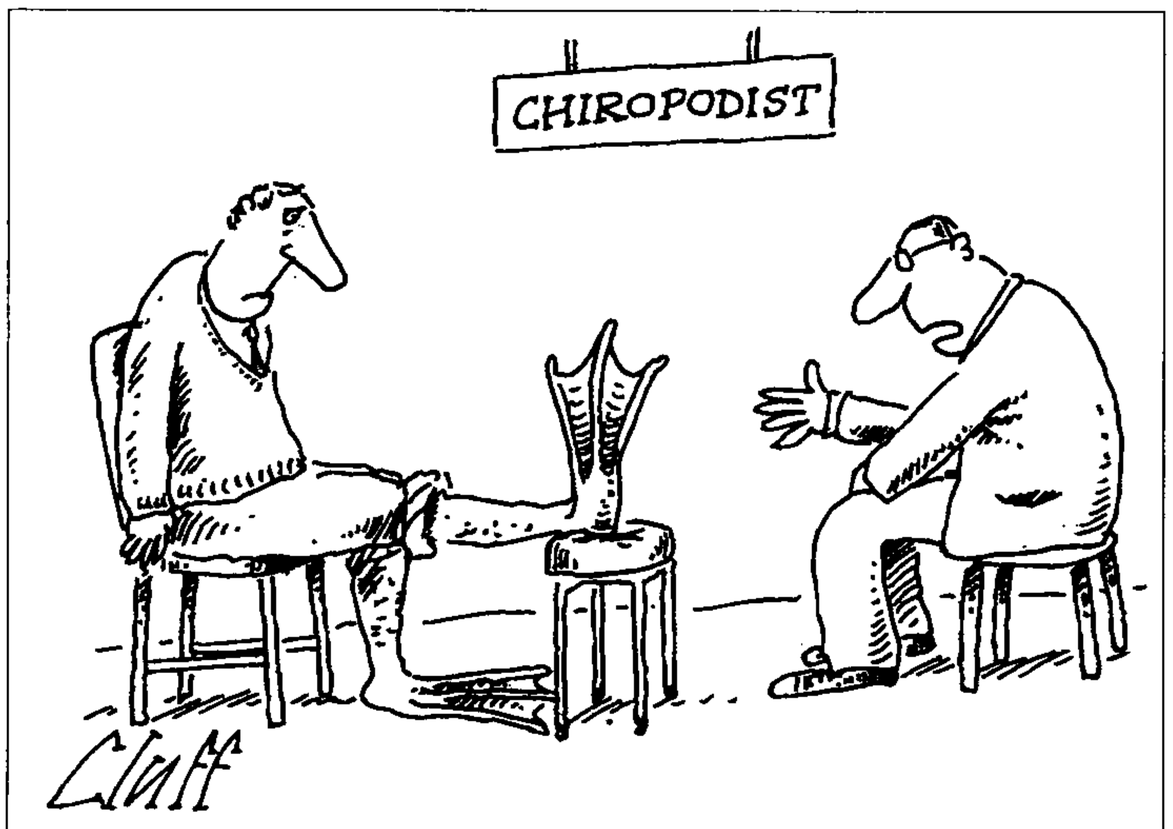
by Our Weather Staff ***Michael Fish***

THERE was widespread criticism of the government's building policy last night, as the city of Atlantis was lost beneath the waves for ever.

Said one Atlantian, "Why were the developers allowed to build Atlantis under the sea? Questions need to be asked and whoever is responsible should glug... glug... glug..."

On other pages

Your Rains Tonight **2**
Trident to be Replaced **3**
"We're moving to Pompeii," say couple **94**



"Of course, moving from Tewkesbury would ease the condition enormously"

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam
Bobby Fischer

So. Farewell
Then Bobby
Fischer.

Former world
Chess champion.

"Checkmate!"

Yes – that was
Your catchphrase.

Now you have
Made your last
Move in the great
Game of
Life.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

WINEHOUSE PEROXIDE SHOCK

"Wow! I just beat Bobby Fischer!"

DIARY

ALAN YENTOB

● Catch up on the latest Coen Brothers movie. They're brothers – as the name implies – and interesting with it. One of the great things about all the best movies is that they tell a story, a narrative. And they ask the viewer to become involved in that narrative. That for me is the key to all the finest movie-making – and it's something my friends Joel and Ethan know instinctively.

● Catch up on the latest work of Damien (Hirst). It's truly mind-blowing, something that makes us think again about what we think we already know. Over drinks at the Met, I ask Damien what's he's planning to do next, and he tells me. It's a brilliant idea, and one that I hope will very soon come to fruition. Art is all about ideas – and Damien, like Leonardo (diCaprio) is today considered one of its foremost practitioners. Howard Hodgkin is another great contemporary artist, though very different in style and content. But why should we be forced to make up our minds between one and the other? Hey, guys – isn't the world big enough for both?

● Catch up on the latest of yesterday's TV before breakfast. Nigella, *EastEnders*, Graham Norton, Clarkson – let no-one tell you there's not talent out there. To me, it's like living in downtown Florence during the Renaissance – that great period in history when arts controllers and editors were given their own remit and allowed to flourish.

It makes me think we should stop categorising TV into so called 'good' and 'bad'. There are lots of different forms of TV and to me it's all good, even if some of the good programmes are in some way 'bad' in some people's eyes. What defines a TV programme? Well, it is generally – but not exclusively – a programme which has been – or will be, or is being – seen on television. And that's it's special magic, which we underestimate at our peril.

● Catch up on the latest Philip Roth while in the taxi to a meeting with Gilbert and George, to catch up on their latest mammoth artwork, the truly magnificent SodArse, made entirely out of used faeces and tulips. While catching up on the Roth – and, take it from me, it's truly irresistible, what a great writer he is, enjoying a brilliant Indian summer – I catch up on the latest Arctic Monkeys on my iPod, and am once again amazed by those guys' versatility and sheer youthful energy. Catching up on the Arctics, I manage to catch up on my latest Armani suit at the same time: a fine new ultra-contemporary cut, retro-modernism at its best.

● To New York, New York – otherwise known as the Big Apple – to catch up on the latest exhibitions in the famous Chelsea district and to chair a few more cutting-edge committees. It's true to say that BritArt is taking the BA (Big Apple) by storm, and Keith Tyson's brilliant, epic installation at the Pace Wildenstein Gallery is as brilliant and epic as ever. Hop over to the space where the famous WTC (World Trade Center) used to be – it's an epic space, a timely reminder of that great tragic day – the day of which, for me, television finally came of age, and for that we should be thankful. Alas, I'm one of those people who's mind never stops whirring – for my sins! – and looking at the seriously tragic site made me suddenly realise that a late night current-affairs TV celebrity quiz show on serious, tragic issues – everything from tsunamis to beheadings – is long overdue. Memo to self: text Graham Norton about it soonest, how about a George Steiner (new book out) or a Dawn French as team-leaders.

Hook up with Charles (Saatchi) and Mick (Jagger) in a gaff to eat a brilliant, epic soft-shell crab and to chew over a number of relevant issues concerning the arts, global warming and Britney with Bobby (de Niro) and Al (Gore), among others. Suddenly, everything seems possible in New (York). That's the magic of the place. I once heard someone say it's so great they named it twice.

● Back in *Londra*, I catch up with the 100th edition of *Granta*, which lets me catch up with the latest brilliant, epic love poem by Harold (Pinter) to Antonia (Fraser):

I shall miss you so much when I'm dead,
The loveliest of smiles,
The softness of your body in our bed.
And if ever anyone should pretend otherwise
You should just tell them to fuck the fuck off
Or you'll come round and splash their brains
Over the fucking pavement, just like Bush.

Once again, a work of undoubted genius.

.● Catch up with the latest from Salman – the guy's a magician with words, a master storyteller at the peak of his powers, the Amy Winehouse of the printed word.

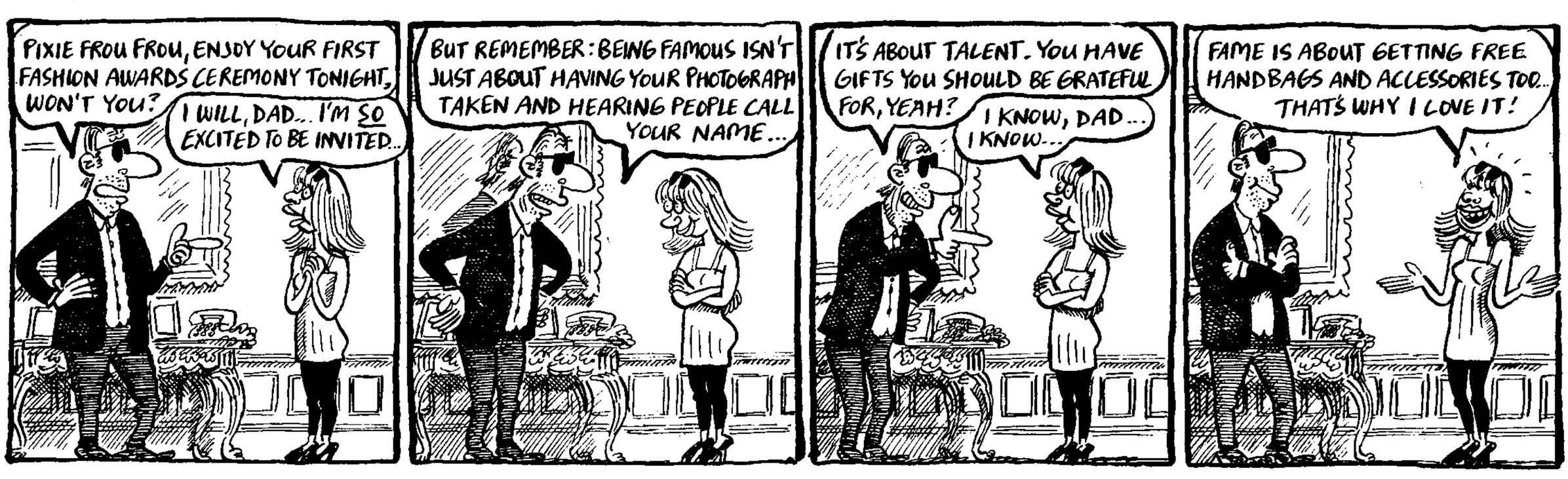
● En route to Cannes, I catch up on the latest Beeb programming ideas on my iPhone. Our important ClimateChange season – a massive wake-up to the world – kicks off with Ruby Wax and eight other celebrities including David Starkey and Zara Phillips struggling with their skates (hilariously!) in the Antarctic, and continues with an Imagine documentary following brilliant artist and all-round state-of-the-art iconoclast Tracey Emin as she creating her latest lighting installation – I DON'T WON NO FUKIN SOONARMI – for her latest exhibition at The Cube. If that doesn't change our attitude to the very real threat posed by climate change then nothing will. Other items scheduled must remain a closely-guarded secret – so let's just say the two words "genius" and "my friend Bono" and leave it at that!

● And so home, where I catch up on the latest dishwasher by Zanussi, not to mention a brilliant, epic new scrubbing brush by top designer Peter Jones and a truly monumental bar of soap by Camay. For me, Camay continues to reinvent itself, brilliantly blurring the line between art, design, high finance and personal hygiene. Isn't it time we as a society stopped worrying about what is art and what isn't? Can't wait to catch up with the latest series from BBC H!Brow, in which top thinker Richard Dawkins joins Alan Titchmarsh to cast his brilliant, epic net over this whole vexed issue.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


PIXIE FROU FROU, ENJOY YOUR FIRST FASHION AWARDS CEREMONY TONIGHT, WON'T YOU?
I WILL, DAD... I'M SO EXCITED TO BE INVITED...
BUT REMEMBER: BEING FAMOUS ISN'T JUST ABOUT HAVING YOUR PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN AND HEARING PEOPLE CALL YOUR NAME...
IT'S ABOUT TALENT. YOU HAVE GIFTS YOU SHOULD BE GRATEFUL FOR, YEAH?
I KNOW, DAD... I KNOW...
FAME IS ABOUT GETTING FREE HANDBAGS AND ACCESSORIES TOO... THAT'S WHY I LOVE IT!

Literary Review Special

The Fourth Estate We're In

***NICK DAVIES** has been a journalist for more than 30 years. In his new book,* Flat Earth News, *he turns his investigative skills towards his own trade and is forced to make a shocking admission: "I work in a corrupted profession."*

He discovers that commercial pressures have led to the death of the old-style reporter and the birth of the "churnalist": the hack as passive processor of material fed to him or her by understaffed news agencies and PR people, making the minimum amount of checks to produce the maximum amount of copy – or simply flouting the law to get what they want while loudly demanding ethical behaviour from others.

Nick Davies

This is the book, originally commissioned by the Guardian, *that many claim led to the resignation of the* Observer*'s editor Roger Alton and one of his top executives, Kamal Ahmed. You can read the full story for the first time here in* Private Eye. *But you will also find a selection of other extracts which contain plenty of other revelations which no newspaper was prepared to serialise – because they too find themselves named and shamed...*

The Blinded Observer

ROGER ALTON has never claimed to be a political animal. His passions are far from government, much closer to sport and women. So when he was appointed editor of the *Observer* in 1998, he was alarmed to find himself being invited to go round to Downing Street for a chat. "Fuck," said Alton, who swears when he

Roger Alton

breathes. "I can't meet the Prime Minister. I'm just a fucking sub."

As the tale was later told in the newsroom, he was greeted by a Number 10 aide. "What sort of changes do you plan to make to the paper?" he was asked. Totally bereft of an answer, Alton stuttered: "Bit more sex on the front page. More sport. That kind of thing."

Alton's relative innocence in politics might not have become so important if his political editor, Patrick Wintour, had stayed at the *Observer* to offer guidance. But when he left, 18 months later, his job went to a journalist with no significant track record in political reporting, Kamal Ahmed.

Alton argued that it would be a good thing to open up the claustrophobic Westminster village by putting in a man who was not trapped in a web of loyalties. But Ahmed struggled. He had no network of backbench contacts. He did not even know the basic routine of the Commons. One MP was surprised to find that Ahmed was trying to set up a meeting for Wednesday at noon without realising that this clashed with Prime Minister's Questions.

Campbell's soup

So Ahmed came up with a solution. He made friends with Downing Street and, in particular, with the Prime Minister's press secretary, Alastair Campbell.

"He was just like Alastair's jug," according to a ministerial adviser who deals with the press. "Alastair poured stuff into him, and he poured it out into the *Observer*." Ahmed, however, did not see it that way at all. He believed that it was part of his job to "reflect government thinking" and that by getting close to Downing Street, he was picking up good stories for the paper.

In the *Observer* office, Ahmed brandished his link to Alastair, perhaps merely as a joke, perhaps as a badge of power. Colleagues recall him blandly declaring at news conferences that he couldn't tell them what he would be writing for that week's paper until he had spoken to Alastair. "In this job, you really only need one contact," was a regular quip, they say. One journalist reported finding Ahmed lurking behind his shoulder as he was writing a story and Ahmed explaining: "Alastair likes to know what we're all doing." Ahmed insists he never said any of these things, although he does remember commenting on anti-government stories at conference, saying: "Better get clearance for that." Word spread throughout the office that as the paper was being prepared on Saturdays, Ahmed was regularly phoning Campbell to read out extracts from the news list so the government would be aware of any controversial stories the paper was planning to run the following day.

Kamal Ahmed

On key issues, Ahmed personally and loudly supported the government; he was clearly excited by his contact with the Prime Minister, inclined to let slip that the PM had shared a beer with him or asked his opinion on something. He was strongly defended by Alton, who soon adopted Ahmed as a friend and a political guide. Campbell also arranged further informal chats for Alton himself with Tony Blair. The previously nervous editor became so relaxed about his contact with the Prime Minister that he took to putting on his Tony voice and imitating him at news conferences.

And then the campaign for war began.

A phoney war

As the government ramped up its claims about Saddam's WMDs, there were times when Alton submitted copy to be included in leaders which, other journalists believed, had come straight from Campbell's email messages. The *Observer* reported a series of extravagant claims from the "resolute" Prime Minister about WMDs without qualification or criticism. The paper ran a series of stories which were substantially the work of the government, engineered in the words of a Downing Street memo to "manage public opinion". All of them appeared under Kamal Ahmed's byline. Some contained significant falsehood or distortion.

Meanwhile the *Observer*'s US correspondent, Ed Vulliamy, reported that the CIA believed Saddam Hussein had no WMDs at all. Vulliamy's story was long, detailed and, crucially, attributed to a named, on-the-record source with access to the CIA's analysis. The paper did not run it when he first filed it in the autumn of 2002 – or on any of the six subsequent occasions that he submitted it for publication. During the same period a series of high-profile and sometimes aggressive stories by one of the paper's most experienced reporters, David Rose, linked the Iraqi regime to the terror attacks of 11 September. Rose later admitted that he had been fed propaganda by the CIA, and to a lesser extent by MI6, and wrote in 2004 that "I look back with shame and disbelief".

Senior journalists at the paper say there was a perception that some reporters were "on message" while others were not. "A barrier prevented some stories getting prominence," according to one. "There was definitely a circle of resistance that I felt was wrong."

When the paper was supplied with a document originating at the National Security Agency, the US equivalent of GCHQ, instructing that six key members of the Security Council of the UN were to have all phone calls from their homes and offices recorded ahead of the crucial vote on the "second resolution", the decision to use it was only taken after several weeks, despite the fact that the three reporters assigned to it had long been convinced it was genuine. During that time, according to one source, Kamal Ahmed "was running round the office going 'Hitler diaries, Hitler diaries'," reviving the memory of the humiliation of the *Sunday Times* in 1983 when it published a notorious forgery.

The dodgy dossier

In January 2003, a group of political reporters flew to Washington with the Prime Minister. Several noticed that Alastair Campbell emerged from the front section of the plane, where he was sitting with Blair, and called Ahmed forward to join them. Nobody would have known what passed between them if Ahmed had not returned to the office in London the following week claiming that Campbell had shown him a new summary of alleged intelligence on Iraqi weaponry and consulted him on how best to use it as a media story. This summary was what came to be known as the "dodgy dossier". And the incident encouraged the perception that Ahmed had crossed the line from independent reporter to Downing Street aide.

When the sheer dodginess of the dossier eventually became clear, the news desk asked Ahmed to write a story about it, focusing, among other things, on the fact that he had been asked his opinion about it while not even the intelligence agencies who were supposed to have written it nor the Foreign Secretary himself had been consulted. Ahmed then denied emphatically that he had given Campbell any advice on the dossier and refused to write about it.

The Dark Arts

IN Fleet Street they talk about "the dark arts". Well, they talk about them in private, but never in public.

Bribing police officers and civil servants, using illegal bugging equipment, phone-tapping and blagging confidential personal details... every so often one of these stunts would break out into the public domain, and the posh papers would look straight down their noses and write slightly smug, slightly

amused pieces about those wild and wacky tabloid chaps and their dodgy ways, as if this sort of activity was something entirely alien to them. The truth was, that by the mid-1990s, the posh papers were bang at it too – because they were suffering from exactly the same commercial pressures.

An inside job

Z, a bent former police officer who for legal reasons I can't name, has spent years carrying cash bribes from newspapers to serving police officers. Those officers have then supplied inside information about crimes and victims of crime as well as pulling confidential data off the computer networks to which the police have access.

Senior police officers believe whole inquiries have had to be abandoned as a result of leaks sold through Z. He opened up a particularly lucrative line of business with the *Daily Mail*, which seemed to suffer no anxiety at all about the fact that it was privately commissioning police corruption at the same time as it was publicly claiming to support the police.

Reporters from the *Mail* to whom I spoke independently agreed that they had bribed not only police officers but also civil servants. For example, they targeted officials who had access to the massive database of the social security system, which registers the personal details of every British citizen with a national insurance number and every foreign national with a right to work in Britain – some 72 million private citizens. One reporter who has now left the paper recalled: "We used to use the social security computer as if it was an extension of the *Daily Mail* library. You phone your contact, have a chat, say you're looking for such-and-such a guy, this age, rough location – is there any chance? Keep chatting. He says, 'Oh, we've got five people of that name.' You say, 'Well, give me all five.' You get home addresses, phone numbers, maybe workplace too. They get you information off the database, and you reward them with a dirty great meal or an envelope."

At one point, according to one *Mail* source, a reporter in the newsroom was bribing a Ministry of Defence police officer who could access several databases, including Scotland Yard's. *Mail* reporters separately claim that they also had regular access to what is arguably the most sensitive of all confidential information, the health records of some of their targets. As one *Mail* veteran put it to me: "If the *Mail* go for you, they get every phone number you have dialled, every schoolmate, everything on your credit card, every call to your phone and to your mobile. Everything." Even if it is against the law.

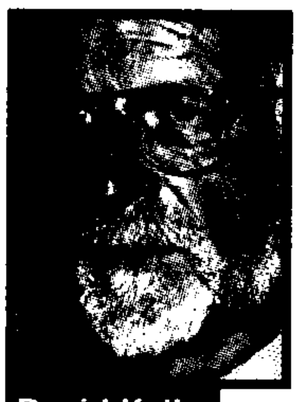
In denial

I spoke to one expert blagger who described being hired by the *Sunday Times* to target Asif Zardari, the husband of the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto, whose credit card statement he supplied. Another worked for both the *News of the World* and the *Sunday Times* in a bizarre and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to prove that Prince Harry was not really the son of Prince Charles: this involved trying to follow the Prince around in order to seize a drinking glass or used tissue to test his DNA.

As the *Sunday Times* became more embroiled in corruption, so, too, its leading lights became more anxious about being caught. In July 2003 they offered an experienced former *Sunday Times* reporter David Connett a bizarre deal: they would bring him back into the London office as a full-time senior member of the Insight team, which specialised in investigations, but they would disguise their link to him. Instead of putting him on the staff, they would pay him as a freelance. He would work in the office and attend conferences with senior executives, but he would have no *Sunday Times* email address, no internal phone number. The object was for him to handle the dark arts for Insight, and, just in case he got caught doing something illegal, they could deny their connection to him. He later told an industrial tribunal he had been hired "off the books" because Dean Nelson, the editor of Insight, was a Christian who found it morally difficult to be involved in the dark arts, even though senior executives insisted on using them.

Dr Kelly and the *Telegraph*

The *Sunday Telegraph*, which takes its place on the moral high ground demanding law and order and ethically correct behaviour, does it too. Go back to the day when Thames Valley police discovered the dead body of David Kelly, the MoD weapons specialist who had been swept into the caustic row about the BBC's reporting of the invasion of Iraq. His body was found at 8.30 on the morning of Friday 18 July 2003. At 11am the police announced the discovery in a press release. Less than five hours later, the *Sunday Telegraph* had procured a printout of the contents of the dead man's itemised phone bill. The information was sent by fax, timed at 15.38 that afternoon. It listed every phone number that had been called from David Kelly's home between 1 March and 23 April, including the list of those which were recorded as belonging to "friends and family". There was no great "public interest" reason for this swift invasion of the dead man's private life: this was nothing to do with uncovering the truth about Iraqi weapons or government policy. This was simply a device for the *Sunday Telegraph* to buy itself a lead over its competitors in finding people who would give them background information about David Kelly's life.


David Kelly

The *Sunday Telegraph* may not have known that the source who sold them Kelly's phone bill had already sold the same document to the *Sunday Times.*

Lost in the *Mail*

I USED a media database to pull up a small, random sample of stories from the *Daily Mail* which mentioned the word "asylum seeker" or "migrant"; and, where they were based on accessible source material, I went back to that material and checked their accuracy. I found that the paper was falling back on distortion to project its line.

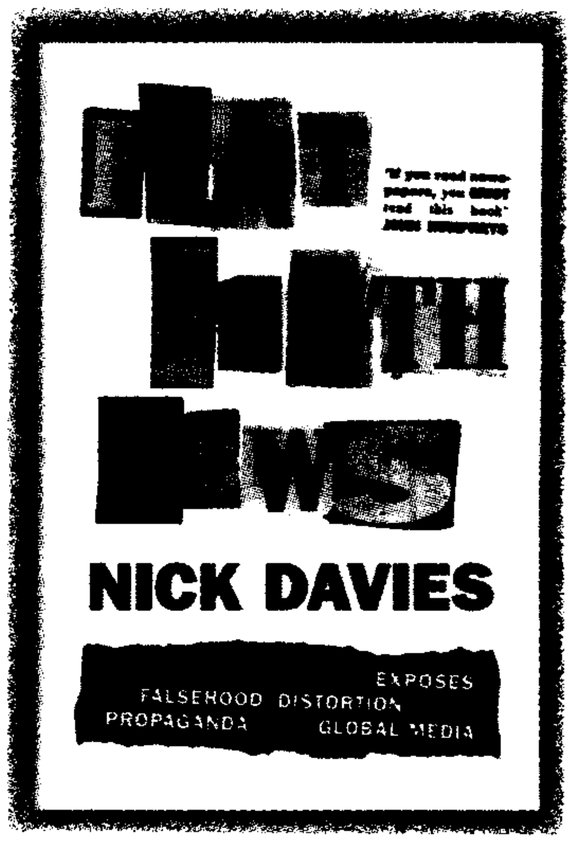
One story from July 2003 informed its readers: "Asylum seekers infected with the Aids virus are putting public health at risk, MPs will warn today." The parliamentary report on which this story was based turned out to be a detailed argument which precisely contradicted the *Mail* line.

The paper wrote about old people's homes which were closing to become hostels for asylum seekers. The reality was that the law required a higher standard of housing for old people, and the local council was refusing to fund refurbishment: asylum seekers, however, could still legally be housed in substandard accommodation. In the hands of the *Mail*, this became "WHAT KIND OF COUNTRY DO WE LIVE IN WHEN FRAIL OLD LADIES ARE TURNED OUT OF THEIR HOME TO MAKE WAY FOR FIT YOUNG ASYLUM SEEKERS?"

At one point, the Association of Chief Police Officers became so concerned about this kind of journalism that it published a report, warning that "ill-informed adverse media coverage" was heightening tensions and increasing resentment of asylum seekers.

They warned that "Racist expressions towards asylum seekers appear to have become common currency and 'acceptable' in a way which would never be tolerated towards any other minority group". Ultimately, this was producing the risk of "significant public disorder", the chief police officers warned.

The *Mail* ran a story on this. It picked up on the risk of "significant public disorder" but simply chucked out any mention of the media role in provoking it. Instead, it inserted the idea that a curfew could be imposed on asylum seekers to stop them provoking disorder.



● *These are abridged and edited extracts from Nick Davies's* Flat Earth News: An Award-Winning Reporter Exposes Falsehood, Distortion and Propaganda in the Global Media *to be published by Chatto and Windus on 7 February.*

Watching the Watchmen

IT IS an extraordinary feature of the Press Complaints Commission that it rules on almost no complaints at all.

I looked back through 10 years of PCC records and found it had received a total of 28,227 complaints from members of the public. These covered not only inaccuracy but also invasion of privacy, harassment, the unethical treatment of children and other alleged breaches of the PCC's code of conduct. And yet the records show that the PCC refused to consider ruling on 25,457 of them: just over 90 percent of those complaints were rejected on technical grounds without the PCC even investigating their content.

Nearly 1,000 were rejected because they were not made quickly enough. Nearly 2,000 others were rejected because they were made by third parties. Nearly 7,000 were told that in some way their complaint did not fit within the PCC's code. More than 6,000 complainants were told they were outside the PCC's remit. Many thousands of others (the statistics aren't clear) were rejected because they were not "formalised" by the complainant.

Only 2,770 complaints were "accepted for investigation" – just 9.8 percent of the total number of complaints made. Most of those, 2,322, were then "resolved" when the newspaper reacted to the PCC's acceptance of the complaint by agreeing to apologise or to publish a clarification. Only 448 complaints – 1.6 percent of the total – succeeded in persuading the PCC to make a formal adjudication. And the PCC then rejected more than half of them (251). Out of 28,227 complaints that were sent to the PCC over the ten-year period, just 197 were upheld by an adjudication. That is 0.69 percent.

The PCC was set up by the newspapers who are the subject of these complaints. Since most complainants find that the courts are closed to them by the sheer expense of suing, this leaves the newspapers – corrupt as they may be – in a position of some considerable security.

Literary Review

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

Somewhere Towards the End Diana Athill

(Granta, £12.99)

Sound advice from the vantage point of ninety years

Religion

Well really, you know, if God were to exist, I think he would be rather foolish. Naturally, there would probably be people who wished to console themselves with what he had to say, but I should not be among them. Of course, the poor sillies would be perfectly entitled to do this.

Sex

I have never been able to appreciate the tremendous fuss that is made about sexual fidelity. When a man betrays his wife, or vice-versa, why can he not follow the admirable Gallic model and commit adultery *properly*? I remember that when my boyfriend Barry succumbed to the attractions of a much younger woman – darling Sally, who has since become one of my dearest friends – I at once invited her into our house, made sure that a space was available for her toothbrush at the bathroom sink, and went so far as to design the two of them matching embroidered "his" and "hers" pillow cases using a crochet stitch taught to me by my mother. At the time it seemed the only civilised thing to do.

The young

To meet young people, as I am lucky enough to do from time to time, is always a very illuminating experience. Given how busy they are, with their Greek dancing lessons and their interest in Mr Lonnie Donegan's "Skiffle" music, it is extremely kind of them to take the trouble with us old fogies, and I am grateful. But we must not expect this attention as a right. I once sat at dinner next to a lively man in his late sixties or seventies who announced that he got on very well with young people and seemed to feel that he was the same age as them. What a silly man he was!

On late-flowering success

I was, of course, extremely flattered that the memoir of my early years, *Tea with Mrs Fothergill*, and the account of my time in publishing, *Dinner at Andre's*, should have found so many enthusiastic readers. Equally I was highly flattered to be asked to appear on the radiogram with Miss Sue Lawley. But really, you know, enjoyable as all this was, I can't think why I wrote the books at all, and would prefer them not to mentioned... [*continues*]

Books & Bookmen

■ ANDREW MORTON's unauthorised biography of Tom Cruise was published in America last Tuesday by St Martin's Press. And America may be where it stays.

Pan Macmillan, St Martin's sister company in Britain, Australia and New Zealand, dropped the title from its lists. The Dirty Digger's Australian chain of bookstores, Angus & Robertson, announced that it wouldn't distribute the US edition either, and other major chains in Oz and Britain seem to have followed suit. Customers trying to bypass the ban by ordering a copy from amazon.com will find this rebuff: "IMPORTANT NOTE. The publisher has authorised the distribution of this book only to customers within the United States and Canada."

The main reason, of course, is that Britain has stricter libel laws than America, Australia's are stricter still, and Scientologists are notoriously litigious. As a Murdoch spokesman explained, Angus & Robertson were deterred by "the risks involved...we take defamation very seriously".

But the Digger's executives have also spared themselves a potential embarrassment involving 40-year-old James Packer, heir to the late media mogul Kerry. James's two best friends, who headed the guest list at his wedding in Cap d'Antibes last year, are Tom Cruise and Lachlan Murdoch. (The other guest of honour was Lachlan's dad.) Packer is not only Australia's richest man but also a dedicated Scientologist, having been recruited by Cruise himself – as Morton records in his book. No doubt Packer is greatly relieved that his mates the Murdochs are helping to prevent Australians from reading Morton's scurrilous book about his mate Tom.

■ THE following writers are among those publishing new fiction in the first week of February (or on 31 January): Martin Amis, Peter Carey, Jose Saramago, Linda Grant, Helen Dunmore, Joanna Trollope, James Meek, Julie Myerson, David Leavitt, Iain Banks.

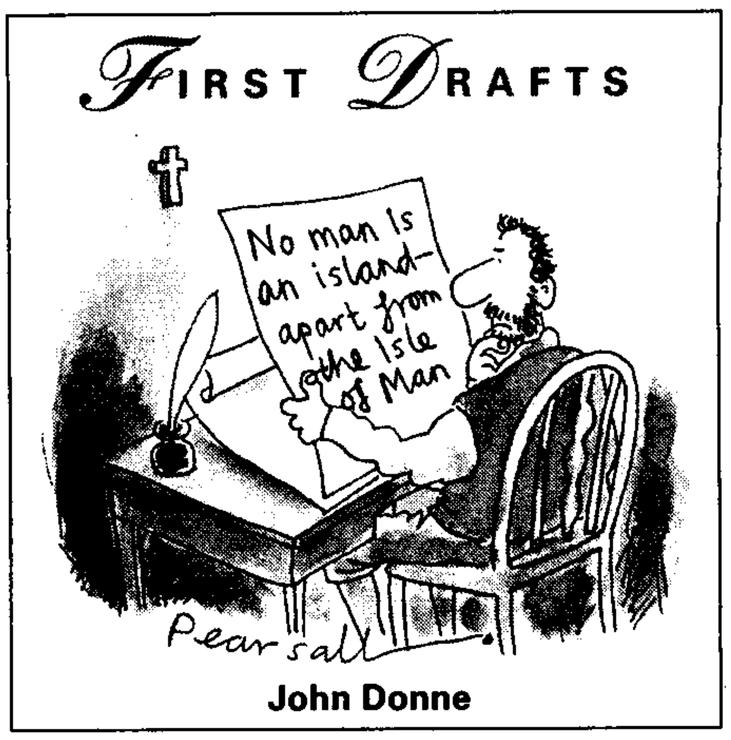
Feels crowded? There's a similar bulge in fiction paperbacks: Jane Smiley, Rupert Thomson, Indra Sinha, Charlotte Mendelson, Alice Hoffman, John Walsh, Susan Fletcher, Niall Williams – and a similar dearth in the weeks before and after. Non-fiction shows much the same pattern.

This ludicrous bunching is repeated every month. Ask publishers about it and they simply look skywards and mutter something about "warehousing". If you're part of the early pack, you're competing for reviews, media coverage, ads, bookshop display and sales with all the others (and often for resources within the same publisher). Not all these books – which would have a far better chance if published in less competitive weeks – can get noticed, and so readers lose out too by not hearing about them.

However, if your book is not part of this wave, the early-best equation means you and your agent feel marginalized. It's taken – by booksellers and literary editors alike – as a signal that yours is a weak or low-priority book. So no one wins.

■ SEAN O'BRIEN'S collection *The Drowned World* may well be good enough to justify its feat of having won two of Britain's three main poetry prizes, the Forward and the TS Eliot. But only in the incestuous, *Archers*-like world of poetry would the way in which he was awarded the £16,000 latter prize last week have passed without eyebrows being raised.

Of the three TS Eliot judges, chairman Peter Porter is, like O'Brien (who himself chaired the 2006 panel), a Picador poet – a connection that in other artistic prizes would require stepping aside completely or not taking part in that part of the discussion. Even more cosily, the poet WN Herbert is a colleague of O'Brien at Newcastle University: the double winner is "professor of creative writing" while Herbert is "professor of poetry and creative writing".



John Donne

■ NEWS that Robert McCrum was at last to step aside from editing the *Observer*'s books pages initially elicited plenty of inquiries about the once-prestigious post from ambitious literary types.

What they learnt, however, was disconcerting: the PG Wodehouse biographer will still be hovering as "assistant editor (books)", and reviving a version of his "McCrummy On" column. Whatever his successor is called, it looks like a reduced, ancillary role: as the paper's wags have it "a Jeeves to McCrum's Bertie Wooster".

DIGGORY POKERY

■ WOULD-BE author Jack Havana (his pen-name) decided to self-publish his book after reading a website recommendation in the *Sunday Times* "In Gear" section last summer. "A self-publishing service I recommend is Diggory Press, which charges £30 for setup and reasonable fees for printing on demand," wrote columnist Nigel Powell.

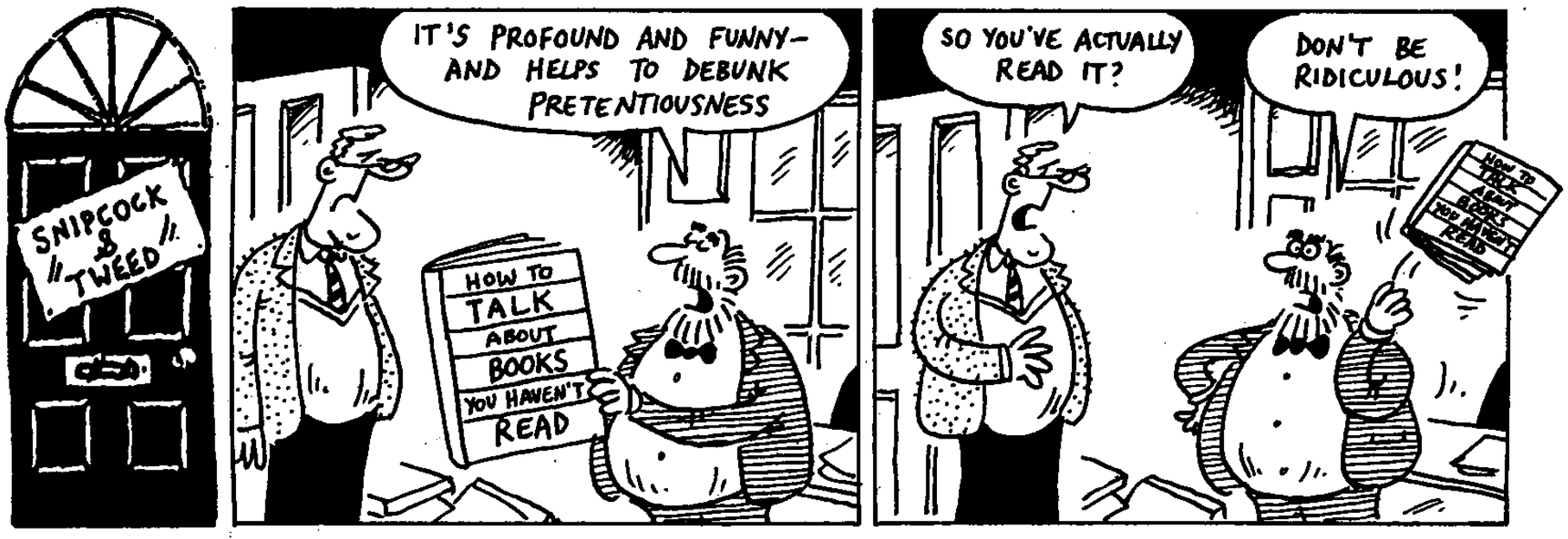
Six months later, Jack is more than £600 out of pocket and doesn't have a single copy of his book to show for it. He says Diggory Press director Rosalind Franklin was initially enthusiastic and took his £160 for setup, printing and listing on Amazon but she then stopped replying promptly to messages and, despite attempts to contact her by recorded mail, stopped replying altogether. Jack is now trying to claim his money back through the courts.

The *Eye* knows of at least 17 writers pursuing Diggory Press in the small claims court, for sums between £200 and £5,000.

One author, Sandra Lean, has received plenty of feedback from readers, but she says Franklin has refused to pay royalties or to provide accounts or sales figures. The authors are asking the court to order printers Lightning Source to open up their books and thus reveal what royalties they are owed.

The *Eye* contacted Diggory Press and asked: why will you not give authors detailed sales figures or accounts? Why will you not remove authors' books from your website when they ask? Have you withheld any royalties owed? Why have you been so difficult to contact/failed to reply to correspondence? Diggory Press failed to reply to this correspondence either and answer came there none...

'Bookworm'


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
IT'S PROFOUND AND FUNNY– AND HELPS TO DEBUNK PRETENTIOUSNESS
HOW TO TALK ABOUT BOOKS YOU HAVEN'T READ
SO YOU'VE ACTUALLY READ IT?
DON'T BE RIDICULOUS!

Pseuds Corner

You don't choose to become an artist: it's a burden you are born with and carry like a life sentence. It remains at my core and I am at its disposal. I rarely lift up my head to see what effect it has on those around me.

Artist SUE WEBSTER,
Sunday Times Style Section

He [Richard Rogers] has three children from his first wife, Su: Ben (44), Zad (42) and Ab (39). Now 74, he lives in Chelsea with his second wife, the chef Ruth Rogers, with whom he has two sons: Roo (32) and Bo (24).

'Relative values',
Sunday Times Magazine

Alexander Hoda studied Foundation at Wimbledon. His work is concerned simultaneously with everything and nothing. His sculpture is influenced by rubber masks, humiliation, Sigmund Freud, Francis Bacon, children's nursery rhymes, violence, wrongness, shame, war, art history, harrowing images and motherhood.

University of the Arts London Alumni Association Bulletin

What's interesting is that it starts with the chorus ('Rinse me out, use me up, cast me down, fuck me up') and that there's this rolling bass line that underlines all the verses. That makes me think of Henry Purcell, one of our greatest composers from the 17th century, who was part of a time when an awful lot of music was written over the top of what was called a ground bass.

CHARLES HAZELWOOD on Dizzee Rascal's 'Paranoid', ***Guardian***

Pseuds Corporate

This year we are delighted to welcome Doris Salcedo, whose installation Shibboleth continues the tradition of innovation and experimentation established by previous artists in the Unilever Series.

Like all great artists Salcedo invites us to see the world differently. She asks us to reflect on the boundaries – physical and emotional – that divide us as human beings.

This is an exploration that resonates within Unilever. Understanding patterns of human behaviour is vital to a company that strives to meet consumers' everyday needs with products that make people feel good, look good and get more out of life.

PATRICK CESCAU, Group Chief Executive, Unilever plc, reflects on the firm's sponsorship of the Tate Modern.

A mix of Southern life and current affairs with a sustainability edge

Cover strap-line for *On Track*, Southern railway passenger magazine

CONTRIBUTORS: Judith Salomon, Mick Boggis, A. May, Stephen Whittle, Martin Hawes, Tim Minogue.

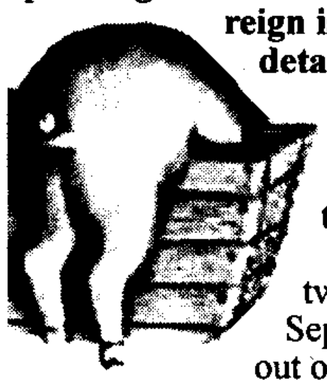
£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

SIR JOHN BOURN

Several grand days out

AS National Audit Office boss Sir John Bourn "retires" at the end of this month, the extent to which scrutiny of public spending has been corrupted over his 20-year reign is laid bare by further details of his junketing in recent years, published following freedom of information requests by the Eye.



The lists reveal that in two and a half years up to last September, Sir John was taken out on 83 occasions by various lobbyists and government suppliers, taking in trips to major sporting events, operas, private viewings, dinners and receptions. At the same time he was entertaining businessmen, mandarins, politicians and hacks at London's top restaurants over 50 times a year. A fair guess might be around 1,500 separate junkets during his prolonged stint as public spending watchdog, in addition to which came hundreds of luxury overseas trips, many with Lady Bourn, at the taxpayer's expense.

Eye readers won't be surprised to learn that Sir John's most ardent host was EDS, the largest government IT supplier whose monumental public sector foul-ups – tax credits; the Child Support Agency, anyone? – have somehow escaped the NAO's scrutiny and *none* of whose projects has been looked at since 2000.

The failure of any of the NAO's 60 annual "value for money" studies to address EDS's work since then is squarely down to Sir John, who alone decides what investigations will go ahead. And since April 2005, the earliest date from which details are available, EDS has treated Sir John twice to days at the annual Cartier International Polo ("the pinnacle of glamour and prestige") at Windsor; a visit to Twickenham for England v Ireland; and, top of the bill, a trip to the 2006 football World Cup final in Berlin. An embarrassed NAO spokesman wouldn't give details of this or any other jaunt.

Equally keen to get into Sir John's good books were the defence firms that run dozens of big ticket equipment deals that also escape any NAO attention beyond an annual account of their cost over-runs in a single report. They and their lobbyists entertained him 20 times in the same period, BAE Systems taking him to the British Grand Prix at Silverstone; England v Wales at Twickenham; and to the Farnborough Air Show. The NAO, incidentally, still has an unpublished report on BAE's corrupt Al Yamamah arms deal locked in its safe.

Summer 2006 also saw Sir John taken to the British Open Golf championship at Hoylake, Liverpool, by water company United Utilities… while the NAO was investigating privatised water supply! Then last January there was a dinner at swanky restaurant Mosimann's courtesy of a grateful BT, just a few months after serious criticism of the firm's performance on the NHS IT programme had been excised from an NAO report before publication. In the summer PFI company GSL took Bourn and his wife to the opera three months before the NAO produced a tepid report on its aborted Bicester asylum centre at a cost to the taxpayer of £30m.

The full list of Sir John's recent junkets can now be found on the NAO's website at www.nao.org.uk/Publication_Scheme/hospitality_received.htm. Enjoy!

■ **SIR JOHN TWO JOBS:** It wasn't just with meals and expensive trips that Sir John was ripping off the taxpayer. He was moonlighting too.

Since June 2003 Bourn has been chairman of the Professional Oversight Board for Accountancy, on a handy £50k a year to go with his £160,000 NAO salary, despite having signed accounts for the NAO that he knew failed to declare his many perks (travel, chauffeur etc).

The accountancy regulator has now admitted that Sir John's pay, met by business and the taxpayer, was based on working two days a week. Which means he can only have been doing three days at the NAO (his extra-curricular activities show that he didn't exactly work long hours).

Officially, however, Sir John remains a paragon of virtue. At his last appearance before parliament's public accounts commission chairman Alan Williams signed off by telling him "you can look back and say you've done well by the public accounts commission, you've done [well] by the NAO…" Sir John declared himself "touched" by the remarks. Taxpayers might be wondering whether they can have their money back.

HEATING GRANTS

Frozen in time

MORE trouble for the government-funded Warm Front scheme that is supposed to subsidise modern, efficient home heating for vulnerable people.

After the last *Eye* reported the case of Mary and George Anastasiadis, who waited more than six months for their heating because of "an unforeseen shortage of engineers", numerous readers have been in touch about long delays in getting heating installed or replaced by approved agents of EAGA, the company that runs Warm Front for Defra.

Environment minister Phil Woolas admitted on Radio 4's *You & Yours* that a number of other MPs had raised their constituents' problems with Warm Front with him. Following Oliver Letwin's call for an adjournment debate, MPs Rob Flello (Labour) and Bob Spink (Conservative) spoke out about the absurdity of the scheme forcing people to wait months for EAGA's contractors when the work could be done more cheaply and promptly by a local installer.

Warm Front's Welsh cousin, the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme, has also let down *Eye* readers. Bernard Heaven, 72, from Pembrokeshire, was told last month that he could have a £500 grant towards replacing his broken boiler but he would have to wait weeks (at least) for an EAGA-approved engineer to come out and inspect it. Feeling the cold, Mr Heaven decided to bite the bullet and dipped into his savings to pay a local tradesman to do the work instead. A trawl through the local press finds elderly people waiting more than six months for Warm Front to fulfil its promises in Halifax, Hampshire and Hull. Isn't it time Defra turned up the heat on EAGA?

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£100m Profits gained by senior executives through QinetiQ privatisation

£75m QinetiQ pension deficit, now being addressed by additional staff contributions

DEEPCUT

Josling for position

Privates Collinson, James, Benton and Gray

LESS than a week after the Ministry of Defence revealed plans to sell off and demolish the infamous Deepcut barracks, where four young soldiers died in mysterious circumstances, it was announced that the nearby Aldershot army base had been chosen as the training camp for the British Olympic team in the run-up to the 2012 games.

Aldershot's commanding officer, Col Nigel Josling (pictured below), announced that "sensible management" would ensure "Team GB" the opportunity to train, while "maintaining support to our own soldiers".

Alas "sensible management" and "support" were not much in evidence during the 1990s, when Col. Josling was CO at... Deepcut. Under his watch Privates Sean Benton, 20, and Cheryl James, 18, became the first of four young recruits to die from gunshot wounds at the Surrey barracks. In 1995 bullying and arbitrary punishment was rife, hard drinking and fighting routine. Even Nicolas Blake, the QC who conducted a less-than-hard-hitting "review" of the tragic events, admitted that after dark it was "an intimidating place".

Men routinely broke the rules to enter the women's accommodation and vice-versa. Soldiers were even coming in from other bases to have sex. On one occasion, when the grounds were raked in preparation for an open day, 800 used condoms were collected. Allegations would later emerge of non-commissioned officers abusing their authority to get trainees into bed.

None of this, however, appeared to be on Col Josling's radar. He told the Blake inquiry that he was short-staffed and no one told him what was going on. He claimed that after the two deaths he had wanted guard duty reforms, and that he had complained about staff shortages and set up a "risk register". But no documentary evidence of any of this survives. And in an earlier report Brigadier Paul Evans, who had been Josling's boss at the time, said the Deepcut management in 1995 showed inertia, inflexibility and lack of imagination.

According to Cheryl James's father, Des, "as commander of the camp, he [Josling] was without question the one person who could have changed things after Sean Benton's death. In that context and without an appropriate inquiry, he is therefore the one person we hold responsible for doing absolutely nothing to prevent Cheryl's, a short time later. He showed no remorse whatsoever when we met him with Blake."

Of course, little improved at the barracks after Josling left in 1996. In the following two years, further reports pointed out that the suicide rate in the army was twice that of the civilian population and higher than the other armed services. They recommended caution about giving vulnerable teenage recruits access to guns.

But instead of increasing training staff at Deepcut, the army *reduced* numbers because of budget squeezes. It was to take another two deaths, those of Ptes Geoff Gray, 17, and James Collinson, 17, in 2001 and 2002, plus a sustained campaign by the four families, before senior army officers, MoD officials or government ministers took Deepcut's malaise seriously.

None of those responsible for policy, for starving the barracks of funds and staff, and for failing to recognise that Deepcut was out of control, has ever been called to account. Police reports into the tragedy remain secret. Cover-up and obfuscation have so far frustrated the families' demands for a public inquiry. And yet ... an army board of inquiry into Pte Gray's death is due to report shortly. There are also moves to overturn the verdicts of the flawed inquests which heard little of the evidence now available. Pte James's "open verdict" for example, came within three weeks of her death and before any investigation by Surrey police.

If the MoD thinks that by razing Deepcut it can lay its ghosts and bury its unhappy history, it is surely mistaken.

DEFENCE SPENDING

Consultants' barmy army

SERVICE personnel struggling with shoddy equipment and pisspoor housing might be interested to learn where much recent defence spending has gone.

In the first ten years of New Labour, the *Eye* has discovered, the Ministry of Defence handed £2.5bn to the heroes of the age... consultants. And that's not including the billions poured into schemes like the private finance initiative following the same consultants' advice.

The consultants' golden year was 2001/02, the start of Labour's second term, as the then Defence Secretary Geoff "buff" Hoon shovelled £404m into their pockets: £67m for advice on PFI; £61m just on improving MoD management ("including Business Excellence", says the MoD without irony); and £42m for simply changing the department's accounting systems, which would eventually cost £110m in consultants' fees. Largest consumer of the taxpayer's cash that year was inevitably advice on IT systems, commanding £171m in that year alone.

The second richest gravy train over the decade was PFI. Since figures became available in 2000/01, £333m has departed defence budgets for consultants' pay packets. Yet despite this splurge on being told how to do it, in 2005 the then procurement minister Lord Bach was forced to admit PFI hadn't gone well and set up a review of PFI under an ex-PwC consultant (the largest defence PFI adviser). He concluded – surprise, surprise – that PFI should be pursued. As the multi-billion pound contracts start to drain defence budgets, news emerged last week that even after more money from the Treasury other defence spending is once again to be cut.

Much of the consultancy cash, £60m since 2000, was paid out for advice from the ubiquitous McKinsey, whose recommendations invariably include paying it, er, more money. Thus for £2.2m worth of advice on the "MoD change programme" in March 2004 mandarins were told their plans to transform defence logistics needed a "strategic roadmap... the organiser moving from a 'provider' to a 'decider' role", while more "fundamental changes to underlying processes" would be required. Who better to do this than, er, McKinsey? In August 2004 the firm was duly awarded a contract as "strategic partner to the DLO [defence logistics organisation] transformation programme", from which it would go on to earn £30m in three years. The effectiveness of this work, a complete overhaul that transfers logistics to a part of the country where there's nobody trained to do it, is hotly disputed by staff.

Yet nobody monitors the consultants. The MoD itself admitted to the *Eye* "we have no written evaluations of the McKinsey & Co projects". What reports the MoD did supply revealed much of how consultants operate within government. One official notes: "McKinsey invested much effort and cost in engaging constantly with MoD senior management. It was apparent that they were able to gain access to senior decision-makers far easier than 'middle managers/service officers' in the MoD". The doors of the top brass are always open to slick "can-do" consultants ahead of the oiks who might tell them what's really going on.

THE CASH ALTERNATIVE
The consultants' £2.5bn could have paid for...
3 years' operations in Iraq and Afghanistan
12,500 squaddies for 10 years
10,000 of the 15,000 jobs the MoD is cutting under Gordon Brown's "efficiency" plans
100 Chinook helicopters of the sort desperately needed in Afghanistan
Complete upgrade of pisspoor service family accommodation... twice over!

QINETIQ

Donald's trump

THE recently privatised British defence firm QinetiQ has hired a top aide to former US defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld who helped direct interrogations at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison.

After recruiting Rumsfeld's friend Stephen Cambone, QinetiQ has won a £15m contract to support a US intelligence office he formerly managed – an office that has staff at the Guantanamo Bay prison.

From 2003 to 2006 Cambone was the US under-secretary for defence intelligence, reporting directly to Rumsfeld and deeply involved in the Pentagon's approach to prisoners in the "war on terror". Cambone was responsible for sending Geoffrey Miller – the general in charge of Guantanamo Bay who was known to the US military as "Gitmo" – to help interrogations at Abu Ghraib. Miller's move to "Gitmo-ize" Abu Ghraib is widely seen as the origin of the abuse there.

QinetiQ hired Cambone as its American vice-president for strategy in November because of what it called his "insight into national security affairs and priorities and the views of decision makers and thought leaders on matters of national significance". Hiring Cambone is QinetiQ's latest step in beefing up its American businesses. The policy bore fruit this month when a QinetiQ subsidiary announced it had won a £15m contract with the US Department of Defense Counterintelligence Field Activity (CIFA) to provide "a wide range of security support services". Cambone previously oversaw CIFA.

QinetiQ's work is likely to involve supporting computerised sifting of piles of data to find evidence of terrorism. However, these vague support contracts can branch out in unexpected directions. CIFA has staff working on "psychological assessment" of Guantanamo bay detainees and it was also criticised by the American Civil Liberties Union for running a database called "Talon", which was supposed to be guarding US bases against terrorists but actually contained details of anti-war protesters. Talon was closed down shortly after Cambone left the US Department of Defense.

ORKNEY ABUSE SCANDAL

Scare in the community

THE woman who, as an eight-year-old child, became the unwitting centre of the scandalous Orkney Islands ritual sex abuse case that never was is gathering the support of MPs in Scotland and Westminster in her fight for an apology and redress from those who wrongly removed her from her home.

Now aged 25, MW (who does not wish to be identified) says she cannot forget the cruelty of her removal and placement into a succession of care homes and foster placements. Aged 12, she was forced to run away from her second foster home to escape "the only abuse I ever suffered".

She was the child who, *Eye* readers may recall, was said in 1991 to have described mind-boggling abuse involving the local church minister and other families, which was to not only seal her and her siblings' fate but that of nine other children from four other families.

Those children, aged between eight and 15, were also snatched in dawn raids from their homes on South Ronaldsay, the supposed victims of a ring of satanic abusers. All nine were subsequently returned home after a court condemned interviewing techniques which saw the children questioned for hours. After a £6m inquiry condemned social workers, the Royal Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (RSSPCC) and police, each family received a "wholehearted apology" and £40,000 compensation from Orkney Islands council. (Nothing compared to the £57,000 payoff to social work director Paul Lee, who was suspended and later resigned.)

But not the W family. That was because MW and her brothers and sisters had already been taken into care, triggered initially by the older children's complaints of brutality and abuse by their father, who was eventually jailed. But instead of the children being returned to the mother – as ordered by a formal children's panel – they were kept in care on the grounds of unsubstantiated suggestions of sibling abuse and interrogated. When Katherine Kemp, the children's panel reporter (the children's representative), complained, Orkney Islands council suspended her.

MW was subsequently said to have given social workers the story of widespread ritual abuse; but she has maintained that she was told to copy a picture of a satanic circle supplied by her interviewer. In taped interviews, MW had said there was no ritual abuse; indeed, there was no medical evidence relating to her to support the claim of abuse. But this fact was withheld from subsequent proceedings and she and two younger sisters remained in care. Her two sisters were adopted, while MW was finally returned home aged 13 and emotionally damaged, not only by the sexual abuse she claims happened while in foster care, but also by being shipped around various care homes.

Not surprisingly, she left school with no qualifications, but she has since gone on to get a BA in choreography. She now lives in England.

There her story might have ended, but for a 2006 BBC documentary. She was distressed after a key RSSPCC social worker opened old wounds by insisting that abuse *had* taken place. MW found a lawyer and has applied for legal aid, but under Scottish law she could fall foul of a time bar which says she should have issued proceedings before the age of 19. However, the courts have discretion to hear such cases out of time, hence her plea for political support.

"I have an abundance of evidence to support my case and many professionals willing to testify on my behalf," she said, adding that she felt the rule was unfair because as a child she felt irrational guilt and had initially sought to suppress what had happened. Only as an adult could she rationalise it and make a balanced judgement about making those responsible answer for their actions.

Orkney Islands council declines to comment.

LONDON 2012

Olympian folly

WHY has no one noticed that David Higgins, the man steering the great London Olympics project currently three times over budget, was also behind that other massive public spending fiasco, the Scottish parliament building?

Perhaps the latter's 1,000 percent cost over-run has persuaded those in the know to keep this particular trophy locked in the cupboard. In any event, members of the Commons public accounts committee (PAC) seemed unaware of the connection when they interrogated the plain-speaking Aussie last March, despite the fact PAC chairman Edward Leigh was in possession of all the facts.

London mayor Ken Livingstone also ignored the Olympic Delivery Authority chief executive's previous when he delivered a touching encomium on the Today programme, warmly endorsing Higgins' appointment shortly after the resignation of ODA chairman Jack Lemley in October 2006. Everything was going to be all right: Higgins, after all, had been behind such brilliant successes as the Bluewater complex and the Sydney Olympic Village.

■ **FACT**: Between 1999 and 2003 (when he made off with a £2.6m golden handshake), Higgins was chief executive of Lend Lease, responsible for Edinburgh's hideous Holyrood parliament. At £431m, it was more than 10 times over budget and three years late when it finally opened in 2004.

■ **ANOTHER FACT**: Within 18 months windows were cracked, the roof leaked, the basement flooded, doors warped and a beam swung loose from the roof of the debating chamber, threatening to wipe out Scotland's slender Conservative interest. If history were to repeat itself, the London Olympics 2012 could end up costing £25bn and be ready by, er, 2015!

ACTIS

Anyone for bribes?

THE bosses who bought fund manager Actis from government-owned development fund CDC (formerly the Commonwealth Development Corporation) in 2004 with the task of managing its investments in poor countries (see last *Eye*), are doing all they can to keep the gravy train steaming along.

Actis was kick-started with an exclusive five-year contract as CDC's fund manager, which means it will shortly have to bid for the work again. The firm's bosses are leaving nothing to chance and have set about schmoozing their crucial client CDC in some style.

Inquiries by the *Eye* under freedom of information laws show that last year CDC chief executive Richard Laing was treated to an all-expenses-paid day out at Wimbledon (Centre Court plus meal, etc). Then there was a perk for the CDC boss of a Mont Blanc pen, retailing at about £200, when one particular deal was completed.

Another fund manager Aureos, jointly owned by Actis and a Norwegian development fund, annually gets into the Christmas spirit with gifts for Laing: a Fortnum and Mason hamper in 2006 (something to work through while contemplating world hunger) and fine wines in 2007. All paid out of development money.

Worryingly for an organisation that sets great store by sound governance, taking these bribes – sorry, gestures of goodwill – appears to break CDC's own rules. "Employees should not accept offers of expense-paid trips for pleasure from persons or firms with whom CDC maintains or may establish a business relationship", declares CDC's policy. CDC's compliance officer takes a more generous view, judging that Laing's day at Centre Court was not "'an expenses-paid trip' for the purposes of such policy".

FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS...

■ **SOAKING THE POOR**: Tanzania has won a £3m settlement at a London tribunal over the failure of a British government-backed water privatisation in its capital, Dar es Salaam.

Biwater ran the contract until 2005 (see *Eyes* 1135 and 1148) after a privatisation campaign backed by the Department for International Development and insured by the UK's Export & Credit Guarantee Department.

Arbitrators at a UN trade tribunal found Biwater's Tanzanian subsidiary at fault and awarded the money to the Tanzanian government. They appear to have been swayed by a World Bank report that found that "the primary assumption on the part of almost all involved, certainly from the donor side, was that it would be hard if not impossible for the private sector operator to perform worse than" the government water company, "but that is what happened".

This is embarrassing for Biwater and their backers but may not help the Tanzanians. The World Development Movement, which helped publicise the case, pointed out that the money could significantly improve water for thousands in Dar es Salaam. However, Biwater's spokesman told the *Eye* that City Water Services, its Tanzanian joint venture, "is no longer trading, has no executives, no functioning board, and such assets as it had were seized by the Tanzanian authorities more than two years ago". So, despite the judgment, Tanzania, the world's fourth poorest nation, might still find it hard to squeeze cash out of a Biwater venture that has been, er, liquidated.

Biwater is also keen to fight its corner. The firm is taking Tanzania to another international tribunal, which is run by the World Bank and will consider a $10m claim based on the "disgraceful" way its executives were bundled out of the country and a claim that Tanzania seized assets in the process. It stands a significant chance of recovering its loot at the second tribunal.

■ **SOUTH DOWNS**: Good news for those campaigning to force the removal of the ugly ridges of chalk and building rubble, put up in the name of conservation across a swathe of Sussex downland near the village of Telscombe (*Eyes passim*).

Work will soon start dismantling the so called "bunds", built along the track crossing the Tye area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB), ostensibly to deter travellers, joy riders and fly-tippers. While bunds are supposed to be unobtrusive mounds built to block access to unauthorized vehicles, those on the Tye reached five foot at their highest. They also contained fly-tipped builders' rubble, contaminated with asbestos.

Locals were delighted when East Sussex county council demanded the South Downs Conservation Board (which manages the Tye on behalf of Telscombe town council), remove the eyesore in 2005 because it was built without planning permission. An appeal last year failed, but the bunds remained while the local authorities and the conservation board argued about costs and how the bunds could be safely removed. Finally the county authority said it would do the work itself and bill the two other organisations. Shame it didn't do that when the monstrous eyesore went up four years ago.

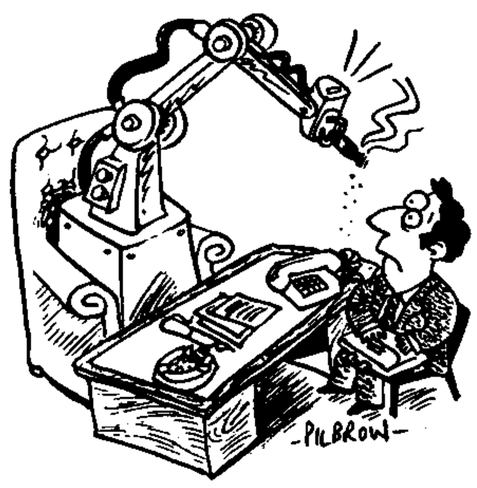
■ **SURREY POLICE**: Congratulations to Superintendent Neil Boon of Surrey Police, recently awarded the Queen's Police Medal. The last time he appeared in the *Eye* (issue 1018) was when he was criticised for his part in bringing trumped up disciplinary charges against a junior colleague following an incident at Guildford police station. A subsequent investigation concluded that Boon's actions in editing a transcript of video footage to give a false impression of his colleague's honesty "was below that which would be expected in an investigation of this seriousness". Nice to know its no bar to recognition by the Queen, however.

In the City

A VETERAN American advance fee conman, when asked by an FBI agent who were the main victims for his phoney loans, replied: "DMs – desperate men." DMs are an easy mark for slick salesmen selling what the desperate want. And so it is with Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling, desperate to find a way out of the £50bn-plus embarrassment of the Northern Wreck fiasco without the N-word.

Their plan to turn the £25bn debt to the taxpayer into government-backed bonds which will hopefully be sold is clearly a bid to entice rival offers to those from Virgin, Olivant and Northern Wreck itself in the next two weeks. After all, the new deal still places all the risk on taxpayers while offering the bulk of the reward to the new management/owners.

True the taxpayer will be offered a stake in the rescued bank, copying the price exacted by sovereign wealth funds from China, Singapore and the Middle East for agreeing to bail out Citigroup, Merrill Lynch, Morgan Stanley and UBS (something until now the Treasury had ignored). But how big will that stake be?



"I had to work my way up from the factory floor"

Eager to avoid the stigma of nationalisation (even if that is what is in effect happening via the guarantees and control of the sale process) the likelihood is that the Treasury will accept no more than a 10 percent-slice of the upside. Yet when banks agree to rescue a company by converting debt into equity, they usually end up with control. If the Bank of England converted its £25bn of loans (never mind the up-to £30bn of deposit and loan guarantees) into equity, clearly it would own Northern Wreck. And as the Treasury points out to shareholders, their shares minus that support are worthless. Darling admits there is no hope of a private sector solution without the taxpayer. Yet on news of his plan, Northern Wreck shares jumped more than 40 per cent.

But Brown and his stooge are so afraid of the N-word that instead of acting the hardnosed way a commercial organisation would handle Northern Wreck, they talk instead of interest and fees, leaving the profit to be made by those who ride on the taxpayers' back.

Just how big a fee will be paid for the taxpayers' lifeline has yet to be agreed. Virgin or any other buyer will want to keep it small to boost their profits. And they now know Brown and Darling are desperate for the deal not to fail so are unlikely to make the size of the fee or equity stake a deal breaker. They will take what they can get and hail it as a triumph for taxpayers, knowing the truth will only emerge much later.

It is perhaps no accident that the rescue deal was agreed while Brown and Richard Branson were in China, which itself has shown an appetite to take large stakes in Barclays, Morgan Stanley and Bear Stearns. No doubt by not mentioning human rights and talking of a new partnership, the Brown begging bowl is hoping to receive a generous contribution from his recent hosts. The problem may be that Northern Wreck is both late in the game; moreover its brand is not only devalued but was never in the same international league as those China has already agreed to help. But the Chinese know how loans buy influence, so they could well be buyers for Northern Wreck bonds and so help repay that £25bn.

But there is no longer any guarantee of £10bn to £15bn being paid upfront by the new owner. And even if the government guarantee sells all the bonds over coming months, that will not see the end of the Northern Wreck burden for taxpayers. Even if buyers can be found for all the Northern Wreck bonds and the obvious state-aid is not opposed by the European Commission, chances are that any new buyer of the failed building society turned bank is going to be on a far better deal than the Bank of England.

Brown has never met a PFI or public/private partnership deal he did not like. Yet going right back to the days of the early privatisations by the Thatcher government, there has never been a privatisation/PFI/PPP deal that did not see the taxpayer taken for a ride. Civil servants are always either outsmarted by businessmen or too eager to accept any price that has a few noughts attached.

No surprise, therefore, that the bearded wonder was so happy as he and Brown privately discussed Northern Wreck on their China trip. Virgin has already seen how easy it is with railways to persuade Labour to subsidise private enterprise profit making while claiming to be serving the public. As detailed by "Dr B. Ching" in the last *Eye*, Virgin extracted £24m from Virgin Rail last year while the taxpayer pumped in a £450m subsidy! Be careful of Beardie bearing gifts should already be a watchword for the Treasury. But politicians are easy meat for salesmen like Branson who know what they want to hear. Talk of future, fairness, lost jobs and impact on the economy.

Unless the Treasury insists that Branson puts in more of his own money, the largest chunk of the Virgin "investment" could be the over-valued injection of his Virgin Money minnow to Northern Wreck for £250m. Three years ago the same business was valued by Branson at just £2 after taking account of its debts to other Virgin companies. Shades of Northern Wreck. So for that, plus whatever money he subscribes for new shares, Branson wants to be given control of the £100bn-plus Northern Wreck loan book and government bonds and guarantees worth more than £50bn stretching for years ahead.

Northern Wreck will need to refinance its future business; and that will almost certainly need further, continuing government guarantees given the credit crunch and Northern Wreck's prospects in the money markets. The gearing is enormous and so could be the rewards – but, as with Virgin Rail, for the offshore Branson family trusts, rather than taxpayers. With a 100 percent government guarantee in place and no demand for immediate repayment of £10bn to £15bn (the previous condition Brown and Darling had insisted on to protect the taxpayer), no wonder Branson was smiling and confident after his chat with Brown.

Even with the new bond plan, the taxpayer could remain on the hook for Northern Wreck for at least five years until all the bonds are repaid from the sale or repayment of its loan book. There is to be no immediate repayment. And even if the broken bank can somehow be put back together, there is no guarantee the taxpayer will receive anything like the profits that could be made by Branson or any other new owner. But by the time that bill is presented, Brown could be gone. Politicians never worry about future bills.

Desperate men do desperate things. The proposed Northern Wreck rescue smacks of political desperation. All the risk of nationalisation with not enough of the potential reward. The taxpayer is now being asked to take a £50bn risk to save Brown and Darling's face while creating the very same moral hazard example for other irresponsible banks that Bank governor Mervyn King was so keen to prevent.

WHILE Northern Wreck was accelerating towards disaster last summer, the Fundamentally Supine Authority was spending almost £500,000 on a bonding beano for its staff.

Titled "Making the Difference Real for You", it was held at the top of the range Brewery in the City over four days last May. Chief executive John Tiner and his successor Hector Sants were in attendance along with most of the FSA's 2600 staff. Fully catered, the gig also featured actors. The cost – £482,274. While the FSA was patting itself on the back, the sliding Northern Wreck share price was signalling big problems. Signals that were unread at the FSA until it was too late.

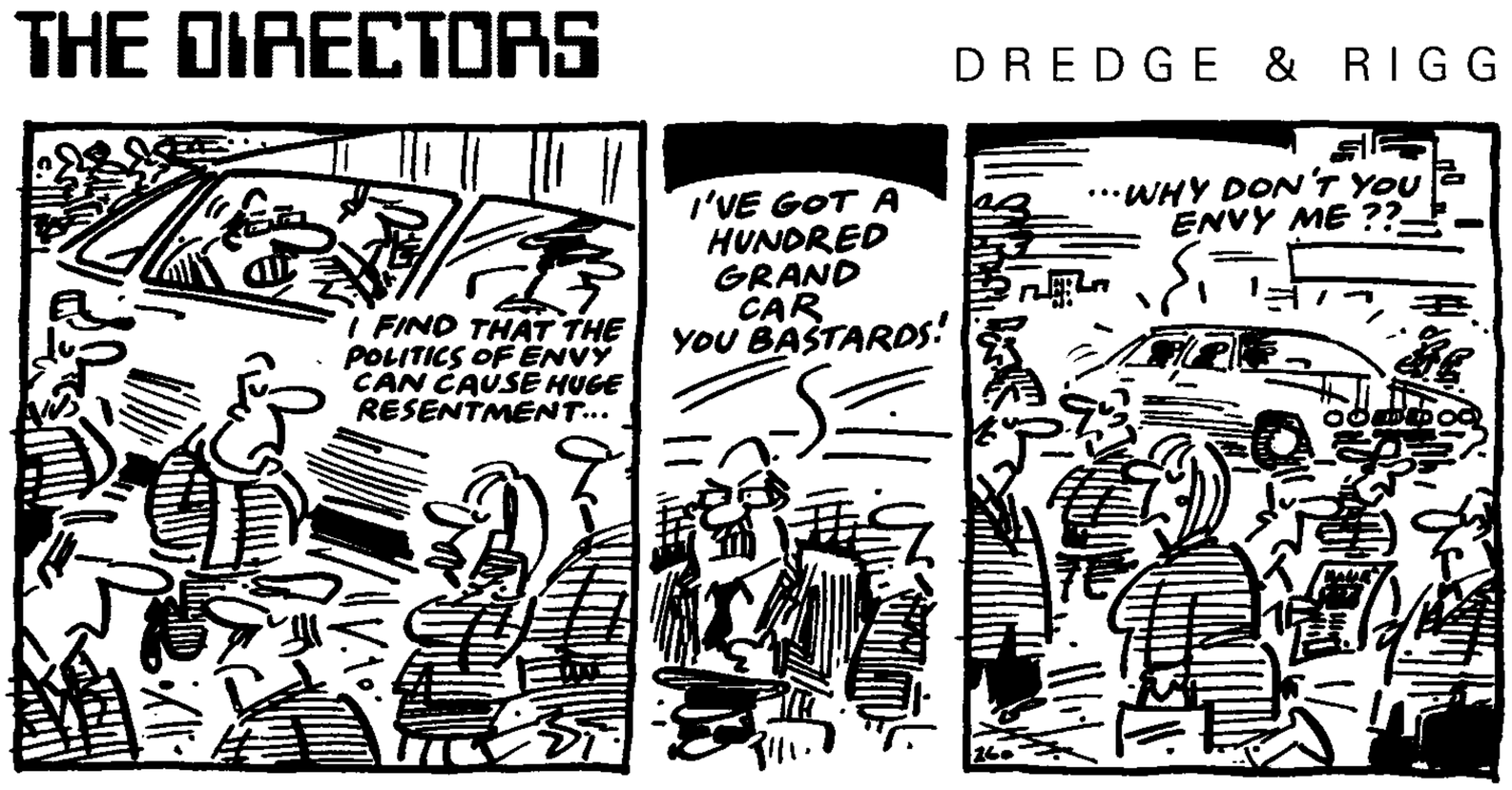
IF THE credit crunch clouds surrounding those fabled financial engineers Robert and Vincent Tchenguiz do indeed herald storms ahead, there will be no shortage of red faces among financial hacks.

The brothers Tchenguiz have provided a feast of stories about deals real and imagined in recent years, especially for the Sundays. Until late last year the coverage was always enthusiastic from hacks eager for puffs. But now Robert in particular is the target of rumours of financial difficulties after suffering big losses on his investments in pub chain Mitchells & Butlers, supermarketeers Sainsbury and SCi Entertainment. He is looking to unload supermarket chain Somerfield to increase liquidity.

The *Sunday Times* (almost 50 mentions from 2005 to 2007) and *Sunday Telegraph* (more than 30) have been particular Robert Tchenguiz boosters. The quieter Vincent received less notice. Not that such previous plaudits sully their current coverage.

ILL-HEALTH is still a get-out-of-US-jail card for those facing extradition from Britain, despite lawyers' claims that there is no escape.

It worked for Beatrice Tollman last year and may yet work for her hotelier husband Stanley with the appeal court. Two weeks ago it also worked for that old *Eye* favourite, serial fraudster Alan Shephard, facing charges of stealing $18m through taking fees for non-existent loans. Shephard had been fighting extradition since 2005. The City of Westminster


THE DIRECTORS
DREDGE & RIGG
I FIND THAT THE POLITICS OF ENVY CAN CAUSE HUGE RESENTMENT...
I'VE GOT A HUNDRED GRAND CAR YOU BASTARDS!
...WHY DON'T YOU ENVY ME??

district judge somewhat reluctantly decided that the 70-year-old Shephard's cardiac problems and mental deterioration made him unfit to travel, never mind be tried; and so it would be unjust or oppressive to extradite him. Reluctant because the judge accepted that Shephard had played the "too sick to travel" card when living in the US to avoid British civil proceedings by one of his creditors, only to flee to Estonia when he learned of his indictment. The US is expected to appeal the decision, saying it should be up to an American judge to decide whether Shephard is fit to be tried.

PLANET FOOTBALL

PORTSMOUTH: Two interesting developments at the premiership club owned by Alexandre Gaydamak, son of billionaire fugitive Arkadi G. Despite the undoubted Gaydamak millions, the club agreed in July to borrow up to £24m from Standard Bank secured on bank deposits and income from the Premier League. And in September auditors Menzies resigned. The accountants filed the standard letter that "there are no circumstances connected with our resignation which we consider should be brought to the notice of members or creditors". Which must be so.

ARSENAL: The serious problems at bond insurer Ambac created by losing its critical AAA-credit rating will be unwelcome news at Arsenal. Ambac provided the triple-A guarantee that greatly helped the premiership club to cheaply refinance its new Emirates stadium with a £260m bond issue in 2006. Ambac has taken a $1bn hit from guaranteeing sub-prime bonds. The loss of its triple-A status could further downgrade those bonds (Arsenal bond holders have already seen a fall in the price) it in turn guaranteed – such as those for Arsenal – making resale or refinancing more difficult and expensive.

'Slicker'

HOW BUSINESS HACKS WORK

"The strongest chains are coping with the tougher trading conditions and it is class that will tell in what will clearly be a nervous end to the year for the notoriously 'half-empty' retail sector. Those groups with clear strategies and strong propositions have nothing to fear. Like Tesco, Marks & Spencer is seen as one of those likely to enjoy the coming weeks just as much as the privately owned John Lewis." – **Steve Hawkes, the *Times*, 5 December 2007.**

"Nearly £1.6bn was wiped off the value of Marks & Spencer yesterday as the retailer reported its worst Christmas for three years and gave warning of a 'serious softening' on the high street." – **Steve Hawkes, the *Times*, 10 January 2008.**

"In any case, the retail sector is not homogenous; there will be winners and losers... Tesco, Asda, John Lewis and Marks & Spencer are widely tipped for the winners' enclosure." – ***Sunday Times*, 23 December.**

"Marks & Spencer – headed by Stuart Rose, who is to be knighted in the New Year's honours – is due to give figures on 9 January. These will cover the 13 weeks to 29 December. Investors expect 4.5 percent like-for-like growth in general merchandise including clothes and 2.5 percent in food." – ***Sunday Times*, 30 December.**

"Marks & Spencer will send a shiver down the high street this week when it unveils its worst Christmas trading for two years. Regarded as a high-street bellwether, it is expected to unveil a fall in like-for-like sales for the first time in nine quarters." – ***Sunday Times*, 6 January.**

"Tomorrow Debenhams is expected to report a 1 to 2 percent decline in like-for-like sales… [after] suffering a weak Christmas." – ***Financial Times*, 14 January.**

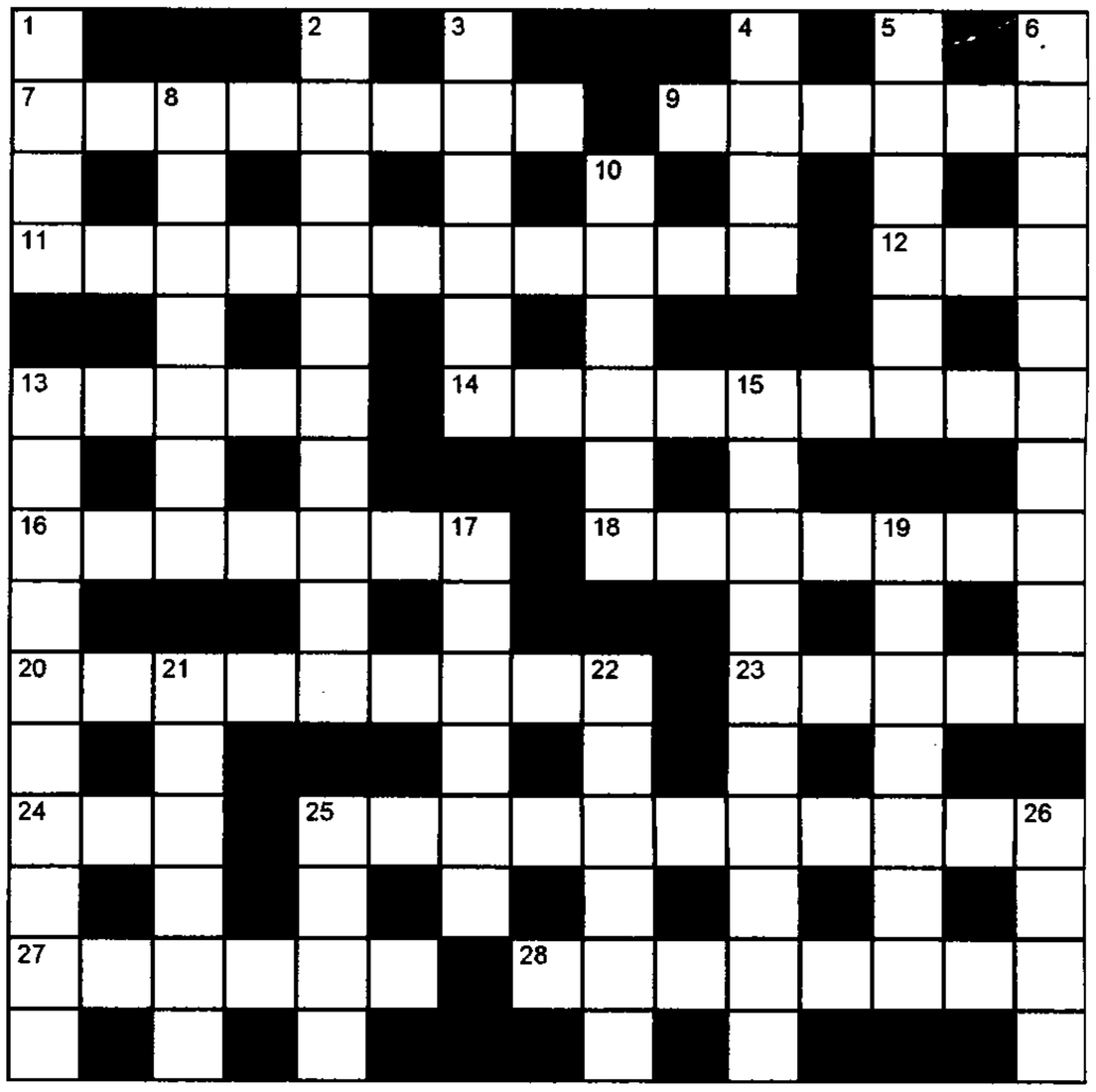
"Debenhams defied expectations of a fall in sales in the run-up to Christmas… to post a gain in like-for-like sales of 2.2 per cent." – ***Financial Times*, 16 January.**

EYE CROSSWORD 357

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 1 February 2008

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

7 Sod lover – certainly no heavenly bloke (8)

9 Hard to take piss in court house (6)

11/12/13dn./23/19 A crafty shuffling of seats – the government's typically late, pathetic response to a crisis? (11,3,10,2,3,7)

13 The same thing as Dot exchanging ring with model and going without sex (5)

14 Nick put said modern artist in his place? (9)

16 Distribution of ill-gotten gains? Very "EU" interrupting to complain (5-2)

18 Fistful of dollars one stuffed in arse gets Cyclops a vintage car (7)

20 Chuck dresses down (takes balls) (9)

23 See 11ac.

24 See 1dn.

25 Misused by corrupt officials having endless lap dancing or other amusement with date in boozers? (6,5)

27 Russia's ready to get leader of Tories out of difficulty (6)

28 For those who'd have no conception of European spending limit (5,3)

DOWN

1/24 For sale by the government? Premier's chief electioneers initially agree to differ! (7)

2 One-time circus performer, Archer, reformed, cherishes independence – toe curling! (10)

3 Drop off whip (little Napoleon) (6)

4/25 Roger has a lot of a certain carpeting (8)

5 Awful slut, Brenda's place (6)

6 Say, a drug session secures end of blue balls (5,5)

8 About the luvvy: needs to be kept stable! (7)

10 Girlfriend Cyclops is getting up – in the middle of some foliage (6)

13 See 11ac.

15 Penthouse-style on-the-job situation coveted by would-be cabinet ministers? (4,6)

17 Saves Penny losing heart and holding bust out (4,2)

19 See 11ac.

21 Something for a religious arse steeped in drink to heave (4,2)

22 Undergarment raised to reveal boob (4-2)

25 See 4dn.

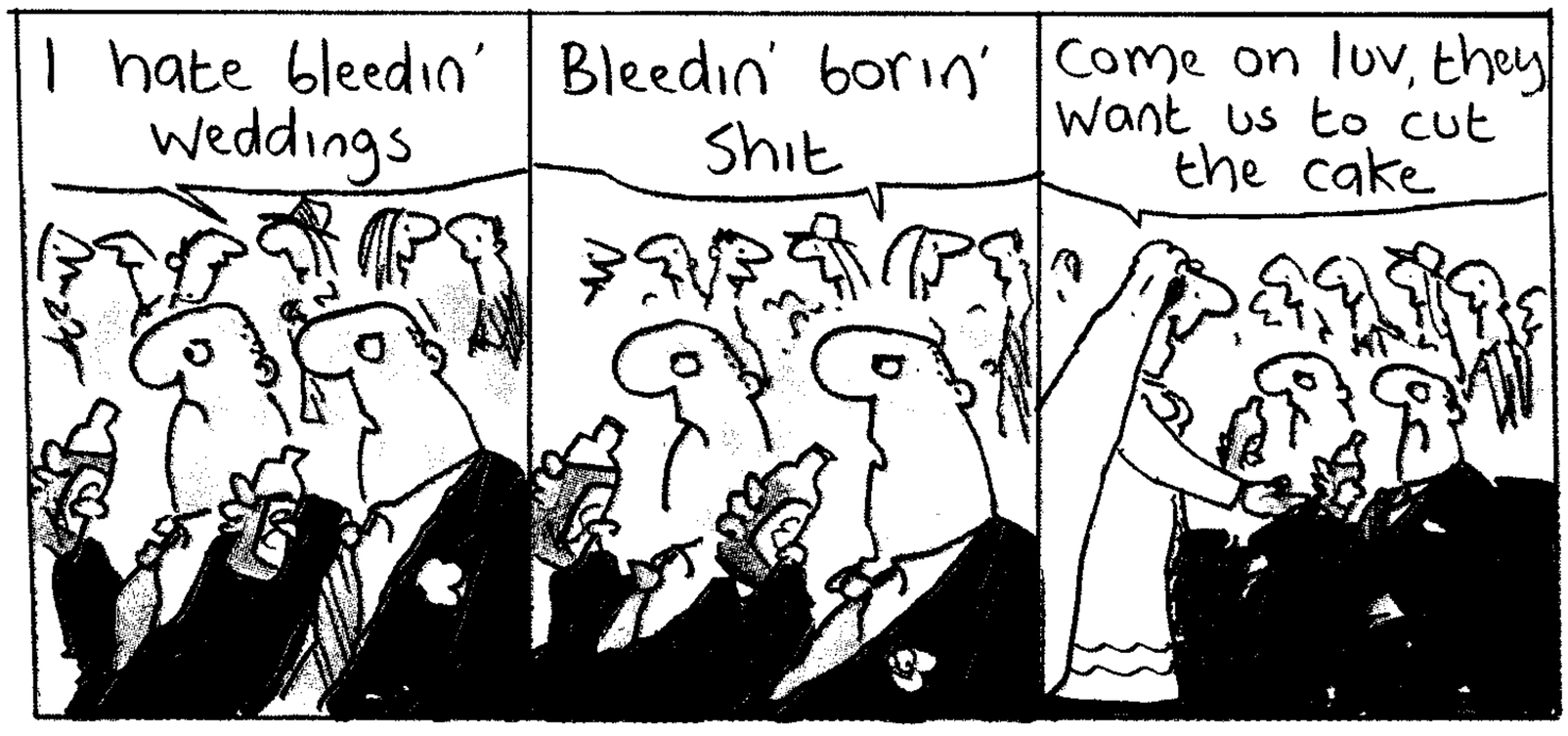
26 Bath, etc. overturned, revealing nuts (4)

Crossword 356 winner: ALISTAIR IVESON

ACROSS: 1 Comics 4 Superfit 10 Balti 11 Umpteenth 12 Laid back 13 Teaser 14 Royal Assent 19/7 Please let me finish 22 On heat 23 American 26 Kerbcrawl 27 Floor 28 Pinprick 29 Beetle.

DOWN: 1 Cobblers 2 Multigym 3 Climb 5 Umph 6 Elemental 8 T-shirt 9 Outcaste 15 Lapdancer 16 Ensemble 17 Stick out 18 Wet nurse 20 Cock-up 21 Sharon 24 Rifle 25 Talc.

HUSBAND



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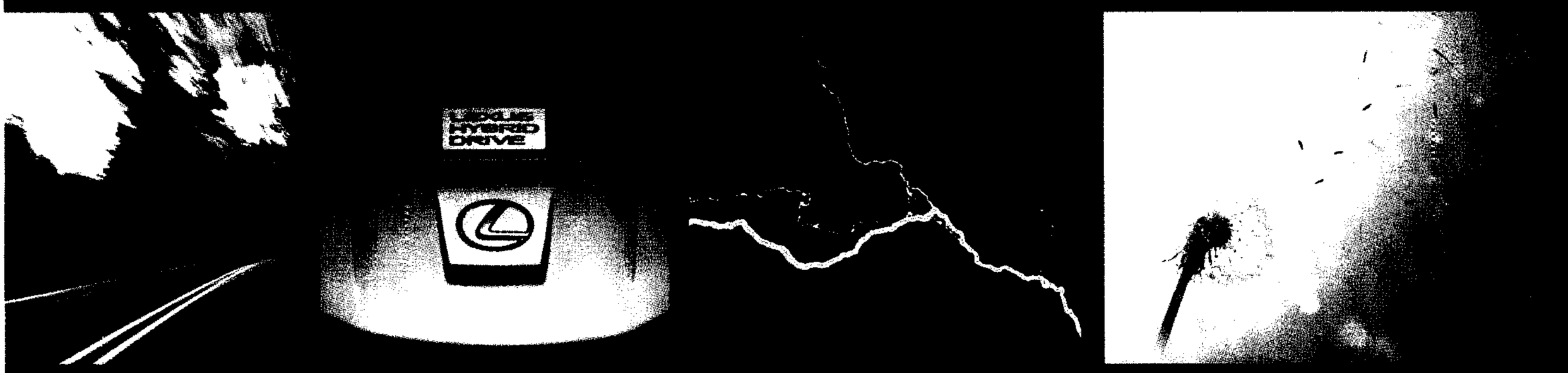

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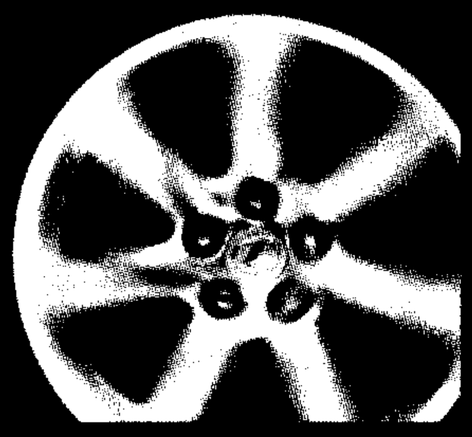

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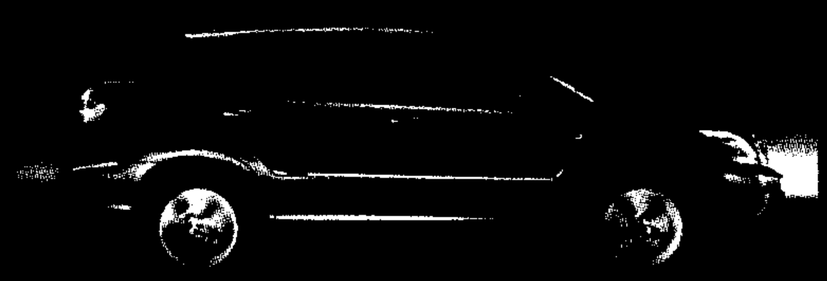

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Urgent Appeal to provide food packages for the people of Gaza

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The siege has left three out of four people reliant on food aid to survive. Chronic malnutrition is becoming commonplace and infant mortality rates are soaring.

80,000 people have lost their jobs in the past five months alone. The closure of borders has meant that food prices have soared, resulting in a 98% reduction in meat purchases, an 86% reduction in dairy produce purchases and a 99% reduction in fruit purchases.

family with a food package containing basics like rice, sugar, lentils, olive oil and corned beef. The package will last an average family for three weeks.

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MAP will remain in Gaza and continue to provide vital longer-term medical support to the Palestinian people – providing access to clean water supplies, supporting children traumatised by ongoing conflict and caring for people with disabilities. But today we need your help so that we can provide families with food.

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Barrier closures have reduced food supplies to a trickle.

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MAP is one of the few international aid agencies that maintain a permanent and effective presence in Gaza. With your support, we will take urgent steps to reduce people's immediate suffering and pre-position emergency medical and food supplies **as it seems highly unlikely that the situation will improve in the immediate future.**

Our most pressing immediate task is to provide families with food. Please will you help by sending a donation of **£30 today, which will provide a**

The need for food supplies is especially urgent because, while international donors at the recent Paris conference hosted by Tony Blair pledged funding to help the Palestinian economy, the people of Gaza were excluded from the settlement.

That means that there is no end in sight to the collective punishment of Palestinians living in Gaza. Border closures have reduced the flow of agricultural produce, goods and medical supplies in and out of Gaza to a trickle. Scores of Palestinians have died as a result of being refused permission to access medical treatment outside of Gaza.

At the same time, while hospitals and clinics are desperately short of life-saving drugs and equipment, Israel controls most of Gaza's access to fuel and continues to limit supplies, with devastating humanitarian consequences.

MAP cannot, of course, solve these problems overnight. But what we can do, with your support, is to provide families with food and pre-position further medical and food supplies so that we are able to respond should the situation deteriorate further.

The situation for many families today is nothing short of desperate. We urgently need your support because anything you are able to give will help to save people's lives.

Your donation of £30 could help provide a family with a food package to last three weeks.

£300 could provide food packages to 10 families.

Over the coming weeks MAP will continue to do all we can to help meet the urgent needs of Palestinian men, women and children in Gaza.

Thank you for anything you are able to give to help.

I will help MAP to provide life-saving food supplies to Gaza

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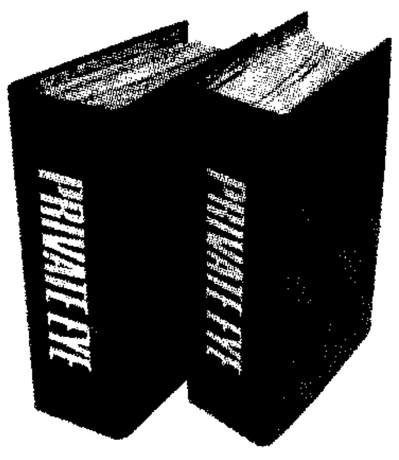

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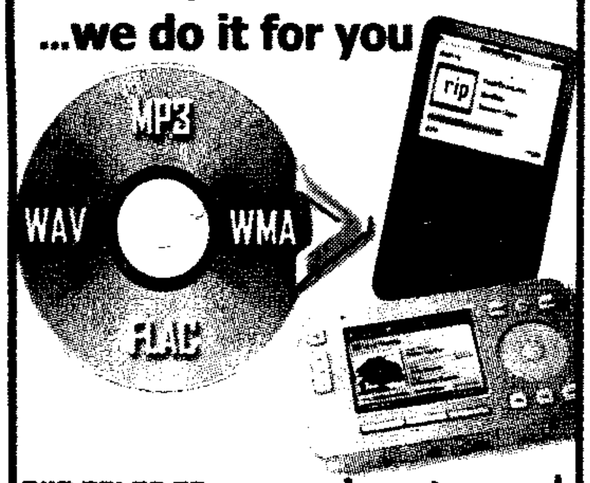

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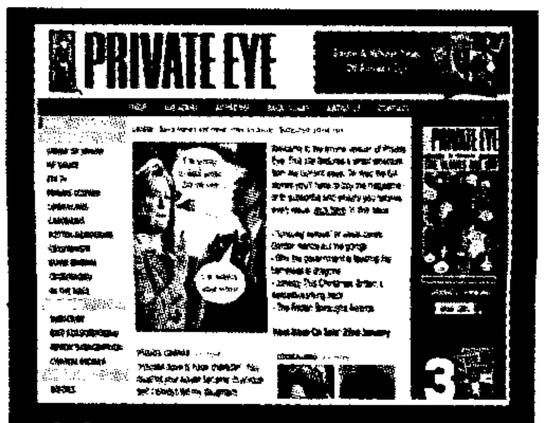

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